

Can the Local Press Meet Western Media Standards?

The problem of realigning the mass media from the standards of the former Soviet bloc to the standards of a liberal regime raises questions from the very beginning. Are there media standards for the international press or aren't there? Is there a general model of a free press worth following? If so, are the mass media in the new European democracies capable of exactly complying with the principles of such a media system? Still another question is what type of press currently exists post-communism in the Republic of Moldova for instance?

According to some international assessments, the media in our country is not free nor is that in Ukraine. Then there's Russia where political control over the mass media, especially over broadcast media, intensifies every year. The situation in Romania, on the other hand, is considered by Freedom House experts to be better. They label the mass media in that country as "partly free." This is why we conclude that there are certain standards for assessing the situation of the press in the world and that experts in political rights and individual freedoms have in mind certain standards according to which they judge the situation of mass media around the world.

We point out from the very beginning that the measures allowing us to estimate the amount of freedom in mass media are values of liberal democracies and that there are voices contesting the possibility of transplanting the liberal press regime from the West onto the East. Moreover, some authors think that there is no media system in the West that would serve as a standard for the press in the post-Soviet era. According to Professor Colin Sparks from Westminster University, for instance, the British-American press system, which he defines as *The New York Times* and British Broadcasting Corporation model, although good for those countries would be aberrant for the rest of the world, especially for Eastern and Central Europe because it would have no chance of being supported by states with little democratic experience. He believes that the press has come to be extremely politicized in the former communist countries and that it will not be possible to change this situation in the foreseeable future.

According to Mr. Sparks, the main reason for the high level of media politicization in the region lies in the nature of the po-

litical transition itself, and this is because the only possibility for changing the system is political action. He rightfully notes that controlling mass media represents an important means by which politicians can achieve their goals; this is exactly why the press is very politicized and why there are endless battles for controlling it.

Sparks concludes that the post-communist media system is not aberrant but is in fact a manifestation of a regular historical trend. Unfortunately, there is no magic key that once turned, would make responsible, objective and impartial reporters and serious, informed social and political commentators. "It is possible that a happy combination of circumstances may in time reduce or even eliminate the strongly partisan political character of mass media. As historical experience shows, more time has to pass in order for this to happen."

Hence, Sparks is a fatalist. In his opinion, the Eastern European press is bound to remain excessively politicized for a very long time, and so there is no way that it can follow a Western media model which in fact cannot probably exist outside the US or Great Britain anyway.

Sparks, however, seems to contradict himself. In his article "Is There a Post-Communist Media System?" he admits, for instance, that Hungarian and Slovenian mass media made impressive progress after the fall of communism. Not only these countries have belied his arguments. Mass media in the former East Germany has entirely copied the West German model (Boyle 1994). The Czech Republic has a sophisticated commercial TV station called Nova TV that has a large audience. The example of the Baltic States is also illustrative. Latvia and Estonia have a liberal press regime that is very close to the press in the Scandinavian countries and Northern Europe. Not by accident is the press in these two Baltic countries, according to some international assessments, freer and less politicized than that in France or Italy. This is why, as researcher Peter Gross writes in *Mass-media in Revolution and National Development: The Romanian Laboratory*, the development of Eastern European societies and their press depends on the destiny of their liberal democracies. If they take root, they will effectively contribute to the establishment of independent media systems. The main impediment to liberal media is an undemocratic political culture and the inability or refusal of political and media leaders to provide the necessary leadership.

In other words, one of the essential reasons for which the press in the former communist bloc remains partisan and extremely politicized in some areas is the government's lack of action or its political ill will. Out of personal interest officials seek to exert abusive control over newspapers and radio and TV stations in order to use them as weapons in political wars with their opponents. This is true in Moldova where many press institutions are owned by the state or by other interest groups and as a result are not so much information providers as docile tools to be used for propaganda or for settling political accounts. *Moldova Suverană* has functioned in this fashion for many years. Through its attacks, this publication settles accounts with members of the public that for various reasons have fallen out of favor with the Voronin regime.

According to Mr. Gross, under such conditions Eastern Europe's mass media need the significance of the role they play in society to be well defined, and they need standards of responsibility and professional parameters. Currently, they do not show respect for the public. On the other hand, many independent publications in Chișinău (e.g., *Jurnal de Chișinău*, *Timpul*, *Ziarul de Gardă*) are in essence partisans of absolute freedom, maybe even more so than their western counterparts. It is this type of opposition press, independent but partisan and politicized, that by disclosing the illegalities and mistakes made by government still plays the positive role of counterforce, according to Mr. Gross. Whether they want to or not, they are the only ones supervising state authorities, forcing them to communicate and not to exceed limits. Such media offer pluralism and political diversity in society. They are not only machines for winning elections but are also alternative sources of information and opinions that force politicians to be responsible to the electorate at least to some extent. The greater their need to be responsible is, the greater the chance of establishing a truly independent media system in society will be.

The private press leaves, however, the impression that the state cannot be controlled and that the country is ruled by a misuse of power and by chaos. A great number of disclosures have come out in 2007 in *Timpul* and *Jurnal de Chișinău* on the abuses committed by the communist government. What has been the effect of such disclosures? They have caused headaches for the journalists, satisfied the readers' curiosity and embittered the communists even more.

At the risk of contradicting ourselves, we should nonetheless note that things have started to change, although this cannot always be seen with the naked eye. The press of the former communist bloc despite being politicized has educated, in Bulgaria and Romania more and in Ukraine and Moldova less, a



*Launching conference of Press Freedom Day, May 3rd, 2007.
Corina Cepoi, the Independent Journalism Center director,
and Dumitru Lazur, from the Independent Press Association.*

public that is gradually transforming itself from a passive media consumer into an active media user. In other words, the number of newspaper readers, radio listeners and TV viewers that request objectivity and impartiality from mass media is increasing although slowly. These are small but significant signs that at least a part of the press in Eastern Europe is starting to adopt professional standards.

The Polish researcher Karol Jakubowicz postulates the development of mass media and of journalism derived from institutions based on the desire to satisfy tangible needs, to obtain social balance and to acquire political stability and professional fulfillment (*Media without the State: Press Freedom in Eastern Europe*). From a practical point of view, a genuine transformation of the role and place of media in the social systems of post-communist countries should imply emancipation or autonomy and should redefine its nature so that it changes

from a tool of state authorities to a form of interaction of various social groups and an element of civil society and of participatory democracy.

Detaching mass media from state structures and from political entities will yield what J. C. Alexander called media differentiation in which they cease being appendices of parties, of classes or of religious groups (Alexander 1981). The process is, however, very hard if not impossible to implement in the absence of a social-political context that would allow media independence from the state and from interest groups, not only politically but also economically.

In modern democracies, it is crucial that the press is financially independent as Andrei Vasilescu writes in *Democrația și Mass Media*. Mass media cannot successfully maintain its role as mediator between the political arena and the public at large without the autonomy conferred by financial independence. A number of factors may compromise this independence, the

most important of which is the improper functioning of the publicity market when it is used to award prizes for loyalty and to blackmail dissenters. This is how some so-called private newspapers survive in Chișinău. It is clear from even a brief look that they are stuffed with publicity supplied by the state.

Despite its democratic institutions, the effective emancipation of mass media, i.e., freeing it from political, economic and cultural constraints, will not be possible in the Republic of Moldova as long as it is ruled by ideologues with strong dictatorial tendencies who are tempted to impose their dogma on all of society. Public opinion is, however, increasingly being influenced by the free voice of the independent press that opposes the political pressures exerted by the Voronin regime. We therefore conclude that this type of mass media wants a political change in the form of adopting Western media standards defined by Colin Sparks as *The New York Times* and British Broadcasting Corporation model even if it can only be an ideal at this point in the history of our country.

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How the New Audiovisual Code Has Been Implemented

In January 2007, the embassies of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Poland, Romania, United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America; the European Commission Delegation; the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Mission to Moldova issued a joint declaration about reforms in Moldova's Audiovisual Code.

The declaration highlighted the commitments therein to developing truly dynamic and free mass media in line with provisions in the European Union (EU)-Republic of Moldova Action Plan. They further urged responsible authorities to implement the code in good faith and in the spirit of European-American values and to ensure tangible progress so as not to miss this opportunity for reform.

The diplomats called on all those involved in the reorganization of public stations Radio Antena C and Euro TV Chişinău to ensure the continued operation of the two institutions in such a way as to realize the potential of their experienced staff. Reorganization should not reduce pluralism in the Moldovan media market nor should it deprive Moldova's citizens of access to complete, unbiased information or to public services like debates about local policies. They further called on Parliament to ensure that the election of members to the future Board of Observers of Teleradio Moldova would be done transparently based strictly on merit and professional experience.

The government did not heed any of these recommendations. Non-government media organizations expressed particular concern about how the Audiovisual Code was applied in regard to the reorganization of Antena C and Euro-TV. They considered the reshuffling that was done was contradictory to European and international standards that guarantee press freedom and the right to free expression and thus deprived the public of its right to information, ignored community opinion and neglected the rights of their staff members. According to international standards and Council of Europe recommendations on public audiovisual media, programs should never be subjected to censorship.

The report "Six Months of Implementation of the Audiovisual Code of the Republic of Moldova" was made public at the

beginning of February 2007. It was prepared as part of the project "Monitoring the Implementation of the Audiovisual Code" funded by the Soros Foundation of Moldova and carried out by 11 media and human rights non-government organizations (NGOs) under the aegis of the Broadcasters Association (APEL).

The project monitored the following four areas:

- staffing and activities of the Coordinating Council of Audiovisual Media (CCA), the audiovisual regulatory authority;
- staffing and activities of the Board of Observers, the supervisory authority of the national public broadcaster Teleradio-Moldova;
- staffing and activities of the management of Teleradio-Moldova;
- content of programs of Teleradio-Moldova.

In order to cover these areas, an expert from the project attended all the meetings of the CCA, and another one attended all meetings of the Board of Observers. Representatives of the two bodies were invited to expert group meetings, but no dialogue has been established with them so far.

The findings in the report are the following:

- The first stage of selecting members of the Board of Teleradio-Moldova was transparent, but ultimately members were elected without clear, convincing criteria, and there was no competition.
- Staffing the CCA was not done transparently as there were no clear selection criteria and the opinions of civil society and the recommendations of the Council of Europe were ignored.

Although the current CCA has not managed to perform all its duties under the Audiovisual Code, it seems to be more active than the previous CCA and publicly warned TV Moldova 1 and Radio Moldova in March about violations of the Code. Moldova 1 was in fact warned about a number of violations including failure to observe the schedule of programs. Radio Moldova was warned about violating Article 19 point 10: "Publicity for pharmaceutical products and medical treatments for which a doctor's prescription is required is forbidden."

Radio station 101.3 FM was warned in April about making changes to its schedule without CCA approval, about its failure to broadcast news in Romanian and about illegal public-ity broadcasts. Radio station Univers FM was also publicly warned about making unauthorized schedule changes and about its failure to observe the required percentage of local music broadcasts. (On 12 April, CCA approved a draft decision requiring radio stations to broadcast local music at least 30% of the time and TV stations at least 20% of the time. Furthermore, local music must be distributed equally throughout a broadcasting day.) Vocea Basarabiei was warned about its failure to observe its schedule, and CCA also publicly warned the following nine radio and TV stations about violations: Maestro FM, Unda Nistreană, Radio Noroc, Auto Radio, TV 7, Pervii canal v Moldove, NIT, Albasat TV and Euronova.

CCA approved changes in the schedules of Muzica TV and TV 6 Bălți that were made in accordance with the Code and CCA recommendations to broadcast at least 70% of their own productions in Romanian.

The second part of the report is a case study on the reorganization at Antena C and Euro-TV by the lawyer Eugen Rabca. Among the most serious violations of the Code was the manner in which the two stations were privatized without being included in Parliament's privatization program for the current year. CCA was not involved so did not make any recommendations on the mechanisms for changing the status of the stations. The Regulations on Holding the Investment Tender were therefore confusing and illegal and did not encourage bidding or protect the public interest. The new owners then became so heavily involved in scheduling programs that their staff say their activities amounted to censorship due to the radical and unauthorized changes that excluded most programs of public and community interest and certain subjects and participants.

To sum up, in the first six months of implementation of the Audiovisual Code there have been serious violations that have restricted progress in media reform. The Antena C and Euro-TV case in particular has come to the attention of the national and international public; it can in no way serve development and compromises the legitimacy of Moldova's commitment to the Code and to European and international standards in broadcasting.

In addition to these violations, the Board of Observers of Teleradio Moldova has not operated transparently. The Audiovisual Code provides that the names of candidates for the leading positions at Teleradio-Moldova, their resumes and their intentions regarding the company's development strategy be made public. This was not done and therefore

represents a violation. For this reason, voting was postponed at the behest of two members of the Board: Veaceslav Ioniță and Igor Munteanu. They also drew attention to the fact that Board members did not have the final version of the regulations. Mr. Ioniță has recently resigned from his position because the current Board membership was not chosen democratically. It must also be pointed out that no well-known media personnel were candidates for administrative positions at Teleradio-Moldova, and the director for the national radio station has not yet been selected due to the lack of suitable candidates.

Another case of abuse was the CCA refusal to renew the broadcasting license of Blue Star SRL for radio station 103.5 FM in Bălți which it had held for ten years. According to market research conducted by Marketing Media Index (TNS representative in Ukraine), 65% of the population between the ages of 18 and 65 listened to 103.5 FM in the northern region, but the license was instead granted to Divas Media SRL, a company founded on 24 January 2007, a day before the deadline for submitting applications for licenses. Radio station City FM owned by Divas Media SRL will now broadcast on 103.5 MHz. A broadcasting license can only be obtained after providing proof of financial viability. Granted a license to a company with a capitalization of 5,400 lei established one day before submitting its application seems unwarranted. Blue Star is contesting the CCA decision in court.

Moldova is committed in the EU-Moldova Action Plan and in other international agreements to the free flow of information. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights further stipulates that freedom of the press underlies the functioning of a democracy. The country therefore needs an independent, dynamic media. There was, however, concern among the signatories of the joint declaration on the eve of local elections about the ability of the press to cover them freely. They noted that Teleradio-Moldova had made insignificant progress toward becoming a truly independent public broadcaster. OSCE Ambassador Louis O'Neill expressed his concern about the resumption of restrictions on mass media and freedom of assembly in Moldova, referring to the arrest of 15 members of the Liberal Party during a protest march in Chișinău. The TV crews from Pro-TV and DTV that filmed the arrest were also arrested, and the DTV cameraman was forced to turn over their video tape. Ambassador O'Neill pointed out that free media, "...is even more important on the eve of the local elections on 3 June." Another cause for concern is the suspension of live broadcasts from Parliament as they were a source of objective, uncensored information and could have helped ordinary citizens to make informed choices during the elections.

Three more case studies conducted by the project were presented on 10 May 2007.

1. The newscasts of Teleradio Moldova were monitored from 25 to 31 March. A total of 166 Radio Moldova news and other programs broadcast between 6:00 and 8:00 and 206 TV Moldova 1 news and other programs broadcast at 19:00 and 21:00 were reviewed. The experts found that nearly half the radio programs were positive and the rest were neutral and almost entirely lacked criticism. Positive news and other programs referred to central or local authorities as follows: President Voronin 16 times; the Speaker of Parliament 7 times; the Prime Minister 14 times and the Interim Mayor of Chişinău 4 times. These references would be justified given the importance of their positions, but only if there is equal access to air time for representatives of all categories of the population. The experts further established that more than one third of those 166 programs were not impartial or objective. They were instead based on one source of information—the official one. The views of the leaders of political parties other than those of the Communist Party of Moldova were not represented. The experts therefore concluded that the national public radio station had not complied with the provisions of the Code and was not serving the public interest.
2. In the 103.5 FM case in Bălţi, the experts found that the CCA decision to deprive Blue Star of its license was unwarranted and based on incomplete monitoring (12 hours starting at 13:00) and therefore was unjustified.
3. The effects and consequences of the reorganization of Antena C were assessed by analyzing the programs produced by the station when it was public compared with those produced since it has been private. Private station Antena C broadcasts 74 hours and 50 minutes of information weekly (45% of air time) and 93 hours and 10 minutes of music and musical programs (55% of air time). Public station Antena C, on the other hand, broadcast 101 hours 55 minutes of information weekly (61% of air time) and 66 hours and 05 minutes of musical programs (39% of air time). The reorganization has thus led to the following: a reduction in the editorial team's capacity to cover events of public interest; a reduction in the pluralism of opinions in news and in current events programming; a significant decrease in the number of programs dedicated to the public at large and with its participation; a reduction in the diversity of program topics and an increase in musical programs at the expense of information (news and topical programs). Furthermore, due to the lack of creative potential, private station Antena C has not produced the number of programs it should have.

The purging of the Board of Observers at Teleradio Moldova in the summer of 2004, the destruction of Antena C and Euro TV, harassment of Vocea Basarabiei, PRO TV and TV 7 and the continuous pressure exerted on print media and journalists are the political agenda of the current government. A law is meaningless if it is not acknowledged by the people it serves and if the political will to guarantee its implementation does not exist.

Corina FUSU,
journalist editor-in-chief of Europa.md portal

Public Audiovisual Media: Vox Populis

If we have become famous for anything in recent years, it is that we have mastered the art of organizing seminars, meetings, conferences and “round tables,” some of them with the participation of international bodies. A great deal of our external assistance is spent on such talk fests. Some participants get four or five invitations a day, so they barely manage to honor the opening of the events with their presence.

Audiovisual media personnel are no exception, especially those from public stations. We can be proud that we have an elite group of professionals in the field, lawyers and politicians in Chişinău who can at any time engage in debates and present relevant information using specialized terms and referring to the experiences of other countries. This is a positive development and should be appreciated given that seven or eight years ago, many of them had no idea what a public radio broadcaster was.

So, we have the necessary personnel to organize seminars and round tables; however, in order for a public radio or TV station to fulfill its mandate and to enhance its achievements and authority, each citizen must be aware of the need for public broadcasting and for supporting it financially. They should also be aware that they can express their opinions to producers of public programs. Moldova's public audiovisual media have developed without a strategy and without integration. Furthermore, the country is mainly rural and the population is passive about politics which raises obvious questions: Have people heard of Moldova's public radio and TV stations? Do they know how citizens can influence editorial policy? Do they know how public media is funded?

In order to find answers to these important questions, at the end of 2006 the Soros Foundation/Moldova with the support of the Swedish International Development Agency interviewed people from the provinces to find out what they knew about public media; the results were published in local newspapers. If an idea becomes powerful only when it raises the awareness of and is consumed by the masses, you will find the results disappointing. With few exceptions, most farmers, pensioners and even some specialists had no idea what public media is although they had heard that TV Moldova 1 was funded from their taxes. Here are some examples of the results.

The newspaper *Cuvântul* from Rezina reported that only 11 out of 43 citizens surveyed in the districts of Teleneşti and Orhei

could correctly answer the question, “What is the public audiovisual media?” i.e., that it is radio and TV stations that receive money from the state budget to operate and provide accurate information about internal and external events (*Cuvântul*, 24 November 2006).

Most of the rural population did not know much about the activities of audiovisual media and as a rule considered it to be a means of mass manipulation. Some intellectuals stated that the methods used by state radio and TV to impart information reminded them of the Soviet period and of Romanian television during Ceausescu's time. “Can you imagine a report on one of the American TV stations about President Bush on working visits to farmers?” B. Vasiliev, a pensioned teacher from the village of Sărătenii Vechi rhetorically asked.

In the same districts, 22 out of the 43 individuals surveyed could not identify any benefits for society from public audiovisual media. This is particularly disappointing because it means that if the government decided to establish a fee for national public broadcasting tomorrow, it would not be supported by the masses.

Many of the objections and suggestions heard at various seminars were also voiced during the interviews. “I have the capability to watch a number of Ukrainian stations, and I regret that Moldova's national television station still seems to be stagnating. The broadcasting time is also rather reduced.” (Silvia Moscalu, lyceum director, village of Cuşmirca, Şoldăneşti)

“The few opportunities that I have to watch the programs of the Şoldăneşti TV station convince me how convenient it is to have local sources of information. They are indeed a means not only of information, but also of organizing citizens,” T. Cepraga, mayor of the village of Alcedar, noted.

We have been living under entirely new circumstances since 2006 when the Audiovisual Code of the Republic of Moldova was adopted and stipulated new definitions and obligations for public institutions. A new Board of Observers was set up and is partially remunerated. They would be well advised to read the answers to the questions asked by the Soros Foundation. Rural philosophy is simple, but we find a lot of truth and a source of inspiration in it. Programs to popularize public broadcasting in Europe and in our country would be welcome on Radio Moldova and on TV Moldova 1. If you need convincing, read

the following answers to questions about public audiovisual media that we selected from the survey, perhaps a little subjectively.

Ora Locală, Ialoveni

Mihail Silistraru, deputy district chairman, knew what public broadcasting is and observed, "Another thing is that this service is not public in our country. I am referring to the most important broadcasting institution in the country which once was Tel-radio-Moldova. Why do I think it is not public? Because they broadcast only information that favors the ruling party. It gives the impression that the economic and political sectors as well as the social one are continuously flourishing in this country."

Mihail Catan, mayor of the village of Molești, said that he picks up 286 TV channels (he has a satellite dish) and that about 30 families have that possibility in the village. "In general, I would say that our television is semi-public. However, it is public for me personally... I have participated in a few live programs. Every time, I said exactly what I had on my mind."

Andrei Mândru, a pensioner from the village of Gangura, said, "I do not know why the sound is so loud when they broadcast advertisements and is softer after that. When they air an interview with an important person during the "Bună Dimineața" ["Good Morning"] program, I do not even manage to read that person's name on the screen because it immediately disappears. I think that the television should be more open."

Valeriu Țurcanu, a businessman stated, "Public audiovisual media is paid for by taxpayers' money. Consequently, it should first of all be in the service of the people who pay for it through their taxes, but this does not happen in our country. How could we explain the fact that the members of Parliament neglected civil society's options in the contest for the selection of members for the Coordinating Council of Audiovisual Media?"

Ilarion Cebotari, project coordinator observed, "Once it is paid for from the public money, it must reflect reality objectively, regardless of the fact that this may be painful for someone. Unfortunately, the programs are in many cases made to order, dictated by the ruling party. In general, I would say that the public audiovisual media does not fulfill its mandate."

Elena Mereacre from Costești said, "Unfortunately, many people from the countryside cannot benefit from this means of disseminating information because they simply do not have a TV set. I think that the coverage of our public audiovisual media is very poor. The problems encountered by the people are not covered enough, or in other words, the programs are not adjusted to current events. Generally speaking, the situation of the public audiovisual media is as bad as in any other area."

Gazeta de Vest, Nisporeni

Ion Teleman, mayor of the village of Iurcenii said, "I would even suggest that the leadership of the audiovisual media be elected in the same way as Parliament is, that is, by all the people."



The American experts in journalism, Karen L. Freeman and Steven R. Knowlton, among the Advanced School of Journalism students.

When asked what public audiovisual media is, *Grigore Munteanu*, who is disabled stated, “In my opinion, it is a radio and TV service that is supported from the public money, that is, our money, of the citizens.”

On the other hand, *Gheorghe Bobeică*, mayor of the village of Milești thought that, “Public audiovisual media is an institution that supervises all radio and TV stations in the country.”

Ecaterina Drucinski a landowner from the village of Cristești said, “I don’t know, I can’t answer this question.”

Alexei Melniciuc a landowner from the village of Isăicani agreed, “I don’t know...maybe this is about a work position or about a service...”

Ion Bouroș, a teacher, said, “It is hard for me to answer. First of all, I do not know the audiovisual law.”

Nota bene! It is necessary sometimes to promote the laws too.

Observatorul de Nord, Soroca

Eleonora Elau, a Soroca pensioner said, “I did not know that (the public audiovisual media) works with my, that is, our, money. I cannot watch Moldova 1 well because there are some technical problems.”

Andrei Mazniuc from Ocolina replied, “The public audiovisual media is something for the people, so that they get rest and forget about their problems.”

Tudor Alexandru, a porter stated. “I listen to the radio only when I take a minibus, and the Tiraspol radio station is usually on. Now it is not like it used to be before, just one central radio.”

Sara Cristal, a pensioner from the village of Cosăuți thought public audiovisual media “...is something that belongs to all the people...we would not know anything without the audiovisual media and would live like blind people.”

Agafia Șoimu, an unemployed person from the village of Racovăț admitted that, “I haven’t heard of this. I didn’t know that they also use my money.”

Ecoul Nostru, Sângerei

Ion Hadârcă replied, “I do not have any information about the status of the public audiovisual service. I think it may be a state institution that goes by the principle, ‘I take care of everyone and of no one specifically.’”

Mihail Grumeza from the village of Heciul Vechi admitted, “I don’t know what public audiovisual media is.”

Mihaela Scorpan, a student from the village of Bilicenii Vechi, said, “I haven’t heard of the public audiovisual service, but I would like to be informed about it.”

Semidnevnaia Panorama, Bălți

Alexei Poplutin, a student said, “For me, the public audiovisual institution is the Internet where you can find all necessary information, where you can create a website of your own and express your opinions at all times. Even if a TV or radio channel is funded from the taxpayers’ money, there is someone who administers it.”

Elena Crețu, an advertising agency director replied, “I do not watch the national and local TV stations. The quality of broadcasting is so bad that it gets on your nerves, and it is not possible to receive the information properly. In my opinion, all radio and TV stations are public because they are accessible to all citizens.”

Andrei Storojuc from Bălți thought that, “It is possible that public TV is funded by public money, that is, of the people, or maybe it debates about and identifies social problems.”

Glia, Drochia

Lucia Toma, a pensioned teacher from the village of Sofia said, “A public institution implies public access, public treatment, a public exchange of opinions and so on.”

Adrian Rotaru, a student, said, “I do not like political programs. The public stations have few and uninteresting programs for youth.”

Galina Postov, a lyceum director was of the opinion that, “The public institutions are for the people, so they must also represent the people’s interests, that is, various opinions.”

Dumitru Popov, a pensioner thought that, “Public audiovisual media is when programs promote ‘pro’ and ‘con’ opinions and offer broadcasting time to various, not unilateral, opinions.”

Anișoara Zahârca, a hairdresser, knew about public media and said, “I do not like anything about Moldova 1, not even the language they speak. The public institution is an institution for all the people because we pay the taxes and support its staff.”

Observatorul de Nord, Florești

When asked about public audiovisual media, *Nina Munteanu*, a cook in the village of Roșietici said, “I have heard something about this, but I don’t quite know what it is. I think they should broadcast about people’s problems and work together with the people.”

Angela Sochircă, an entrepreneur thought, "I would like a Moldovan TV station for children. A public institution should benefit everyone, shouldn't it?"

Alexandru Munteanu, a woodcarver said, "These are stations that should work in the people's name and go by the people's opinions."

Nicolae Perciun, a builder said, "Of course, almost all of them sit on the people's money, especially the money of those working in Moscow and other places."

Mihai Burduja, a pensioner 80 years old said, "I watch the Moldovan station most of all. I don't know."

Elidia Murafa from the History and Ethnography Museum replied, "We work in the public sector and do not have enough money to buy a satellite dish or to connect to cable television. These are institutions that should present information truthfully and should include social diversity in this information so that all citizens can find something for themselves."

Mihai Tudos, town councilor thought, "This is a good thing, but we do not have anything like this. All we have is television and radio on order. Because we pay the taxes, they fool us with our own money."

Angela Baj, a doctor replied that, "It is an efficient means of informing the population correctly."

Alexei Ciobanu, a student said, "It is a possibility of presenting the information in a neutral way."

Est-Curier, Dubăsari

Lidia Cibotaru, a teacher in the village of Hârtopul Mic was of the opinion that, "It would be good to have more interesting programs on Moldova 1, more live programs with the public, like surveys with people on the street, asking them what they want, what they think, how they see their futures."

Igor Costiuc, a teacher from the village of Ustia said, "In my view, the public audiovisual media are those radio and TV stations that reflect the opinions of the entire society and not only of the government. Unfortunately, we have public media in name only. It should broadcast a large variety of opinions and cover the lives of ordinary people and not only of the country's leadership. All topics should be treated in an objective way."

Irina Stratulat, a saleswoman from the village of Corjova said, "We watch only Russian stations by cable and those from Tiraspol. Unfortunately, we do not watch any Romanian stations or those from Chișinău."

Petru Chetrușca from the village of Ratuș replied, "The public audiovisual media are the state radio and TV stations. Unlike the private ones, they broadcast only what is allowed from above by the administration; certain things are censored. Public stations also have greater coverage."

Mihai Odobescu an agronomist from the village of Ohrincea answered, "The public audiovisual media? It is the radio and television that cover society's needs. It's social and economic and can even promote certain national ideas."

Elena Frumosu, Criuleni museum director said, "It is something new for Moldova."

Unghiul, Ungheni

Nina Patrașcu, a teacher from the town of Cornești said, "Based on what I have seen on Moldova 1 so far, I think that public television serves the state authorities."

Veaceslav Suprovici, a public officer replied, "I watch the news on Moldova 1 and the parliamentary sessions that are broadcast live on Thursdays."

Cristian Jardan, a business consultant, watches only football games on Moldova 1. He is one of the few who gave an adequate definition of the concept of public audiovisual media which he considers to be, "...a service funded by the people...aimed to provide objective information, without distorted news, and to offer quality informative, cultural, artistic, sports etc. programming to viewers."

Natalia Bujor, a teacher replied, "I could not say that Moldova 1 is a public audiovisual service because it broadcasts very few entertainment and cultural programs. It is not possible with the current state of things to capture the interests of all TV viewers, regardless of their ages, and this is exactly what public television implies."

There are many more answers; we will present them another time. Note that these are the voices of the people. They differ from and are more direct than the highly theoretical, decidedly diplomatic discourse heard at seminars and round tables. Local journalists pointed out that many people in villages now have satellite dishes, that cable networks are shooting up like mushrooms and that people have become used to and prefer Romanian and Russian channels at the expense of local ones.

Implementing wide coverage and reforming public and private audiovisual media will therefore take place in the face of stiff outside competition and will require extremely significant efforts. The next two or three years will show to what extent we are able to enact necessary reforms. There are no alternatives.

Constantin PÂRȚAC

The Political Press in Moldova

Out of circa 70 titles of national newspapers in Romanian and 60 in Russian entered in the 2007 Newspaper and Magazine Catalogue published by the state enterprise Poșta Moldovei, we counted nine belonging to political parties though only five of them acknowledge that fact on the frontispiece or in the technical box.

Those five are the following:

- *Alianța Moldova Noastră* belonging to the party with the same name (Our Moldova Alliance);
- *Socius*, the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party (SDP);
- *Comunistul*, the bilingual publication of the Communist Party (CPRM);
- *Puls*, the newspaper of the Communist Youth Union;
- *Acțiunea Europeană*, the bulletin of the European Action Movement.

Although the Moldovan public knows that the newspapers *Flux*, *Novoie Vremea*, *Moldavskie Vedomosti* and *Democrația* belong to or are funded by the Christian Democratic People's Party (CDPP), the Democratic Party (DP), the Republican People's Party (RPP) and the Social Liberal Party (SLP) respectively, the papers do not indicate this fact anywhere.

We also have a different type of press in Moldova that can easily be labeled as belonging to a party. It includes two newspapers that were privatized about two years ago but whose editorial policies continue to favor the current state leadership. They are *Moldova Suverană* and *Nezavisimaia Moldova*. Since almost all the power in the country is held by CPRM, we can add them to the list of newspapers that do party work.

Scarce and Cheap

The political press in Moldova has not withstood the test of time except in a few instances. We have had many party newspapers since the declaration of independence most of which were established on the eve of electoral campaigns and disappeared shortly thereafter, especially if the party leader (and newspaper boss) did not obtain the desired results. The number of party newspapers is relatively small today in Moldova when taking into account the 40 political parties registered with the Ministry of Justice. This is due to the fact that political leaders do not hesitate either permanently or periodically to subsidize certain so-called independent

newspapers which then behave like party newspapers during electoral campaigns.

Subscriptions to party newspapers and their retail prices at newsstands are generally cheaper than that of Moldovan publications that are not funded by political or economic entities, and many are even distributed free of charge. For example, a copy of the Friday issue of *Jurnal de Chișinău* costs three lei while the SDPM publication *Socius* costs only one because payroll, maintenance, printing and distribution costs are covered by the party. Nonetheless, people do not line up today for the party press at post offices or at newsstands. Proof of this is the small print runs indicated in their technical boxes (which are usually inflated because there is no strict control over this in Moldova).

Alianța Moldova Noastră, *Socius*, *Moldavskie Vedomosti* and *Novoe Vremea*

Alianța Moldova Noastră of the party with the same name comes out both in Romanian and in Russian. It is a weekly with a print run of 5,000 copies. Most of its subscribers are party members from the provinces looking for information about the party's activities.

Socius has almost the same editorial policy as *Alianța Moldova Noastră*. It appeared in the country's media market shortly before the campaign for the 2005 parliamentary elections. It is a weekly of 8 pages in A3 format with a print run of 4,500. The party's name is not indicated on the frontispiece, but the initials SDPM do appear with the statement that it is, "a social-democratic weekly publication of information, opinions and attitudes." According to the newspaper's editor-in-chief, Elena Panuș, the publication does not cover only the party's activities, although it is entirely supported by it; it also contains information about current events, analysis, items for youth, entertainment and other features.

Moldavskie Vedomosti has the inscription "people's newspaper" on its frontispiece which may be meant to suggest that it is supported by RPP. Although it generally behaves, with few exceptions, as an independent newspaper, it turns into a party newspaper during electoral campaigns. The situation is the same with the newspaper *Novoie Vremea* sponsored by DP.

Comunistul and *Puls*

Like *Alianța Moldova Noastră*, CPRM's newspaper *Comunistul* is also a bilingual weekly. The newspaper acknowledges

on its frontispiece that CPRM owns it. It is perhaps the most classical party newspaper in Moldova because its editorial policy is rather propagandistic just like in the Soviet period and proudly presents the communists' activities and continuously praises the party leadership. It also notes memorable dates for communists inherited from Soviet times and criticizes the party's political opponents. If we believe the print run indicated in the newspaper's technical box (59,880), it is among the most widely read publications in the country. Other publications have repeatedly pointed out that *Comunistul* has also been distributed free of charge to people's homes without their subscribing to or even requesting it, especially during election campaigns.

The Communist Youth Union, an organization of CPRM, is the founder of the newspaper *Puls* that has a print run of 3,600 copies. Although it claims to be for communist youth, it publishes analytical articles about the successes of the current government, the situation in Transnistria, Tiraspol leaders and articles criticizing the political opponents of the current regime. These are not usual topics for youth and are rather hard for young people to understand.

Flux, Democrația and Acțiunea Europeană

One does not need to think hard to understand which party supports the national daily *Flux*. The paper is full of stories about CDPP members, especially the party's leaders. It has an impressive print run of 45,515 copies, but again, it is not known how accurate that figure is.

The frontispieces of *Democrația* and *Acțiunea Europeană* have the inscriptions, "Founder: the Institute of European Studies of Moldova." While Anatol Petrencu, the leader of the European Action Movement, holds that this institute is part of the movement, the newspaper *Democrația* undoubtedly belongs to the SLP, although it covers events in the country more or less objectively. Articles about SLP activities are always present.

According to Mr. Petrencu, *Acțiunea Europeană* is an informative bulletin of eight pages that covers the activities of the party and is distributed free of charge. Its print run does not exceed 1,000 copies.

Why Do Print Journalists Choose to Work for a Party Newspaper?

We have noticed that certain print journalists have worked for one party newspaper and then emigrated to the publica-

tion of a totally different party at the opposite political pole from the first one. Some currently employed by party newspapers told us that their motivation for working for them was either financial (although the salaries paid by parties to their newspaper employees are about the same as those of other newspapers, except for those who are in charge of the publication) or was based on political conviction (they admire or are even members of the party). Some also said that they chose to write for these newspapers because the Moldovan media market is small compared with the number of journalists prepared by the country's journalism faculties, and party publications often hire students or recent graduates.

Is There a Party Press in Moldova or Is There Not?

Petru Macovei, Executive Director of the Association of Independent Press, thinks that there is almost no party press in Moldova. "I say 'almost' because there are, nonetheless, a few titles on frontispieces that clearly say that they are official publications of the respective entity. Due to the fact that they are nothing but 'mouthpieces' in the Soviet sense of this word, such newspapers reflect exclusively the party's point of view, which presumes from the very beginning a smaller share of trust on behalf of the readers. But political parties need as many admirers/voters as possible, and therefore they prefer to provide partial or total financial support to publications that claim to be independent in exchange for their loyalty. Some of these newspapers even behave like independent newspapers, that is, they present the facts more or less objectively, but this happens only before elections. During electoral campaigns they are partisan in favor of the party that offers them funding. Others do not even make efforts to mask that they are entirely biased in favor of one party or another claiming at the same time to be independent. These are situations that affect all journalists and that undermine the population's trust in the press," he says.

The former Chief of the OSCE Mission in Chișinău, William Hill, thinks that print media in Moldova, "...is to a large extent party press." In an interview with the newspaper *Timpul* upon his departure from Moldova, Mr. Hill compared the local media with that in Romania and noted a big difference. "I traveled very often to Romania and can assert that the press is free there. The state does not get involved, journalists write freely, publish what they want and public opinion decides what to choose. This is how it is supposed to be. If this is possible in Romania, why would it not be possible in Moldova as well?" he wondered. In order to change the current situation in Moldova, Mr. Hill says that, "...it is necessary to open the media market to foreign and local investment."

Raisa LOZINSCHI

The Internet: a Serious Challenge for Moldovan Mass Media

Today, if you are not on the global network, it's like you do not exist. A website or a blog is the most reliable business card.

The Internet is not a privilege, it's a lifestyle. "Online" is the watchword of today's society, especially for the younger generations. Those who do not conform miss the train. The Internet does not wait. The more accessible it is, the more complex it becomes through continuous transformations. The rules are rewritten daily, so what is valid today is outdated tomorrow.

To be online is also the latest trend in mass media. The time has passed when it was enough to have an electronic page with text. Now, if a website is not updated and interactive it is dead. Everything takes place in the here and now. TV and radio stations broadcast online, and publications are edited online.

To what extent is our press online, and how has it adapted to virtual reality and the speed of the Internet? The media present in the .md space is clearly grouped in two large categories: classic institutions (print, audiovisual, press agencies) and proper online media (online publications, information portals, blogs). The biggest difference between them is not so much that one is old and the other is new but is rather that being online means interacting with readers, not just occupying virtual space.

Print Media

In the case of print media, online is mostly offline as many publications are missing altogether on the web and many others are only static electronic versions of their hard copies. They lack life, they do not have a continuous flow and they may not be current and are not interactive, functional or accessible. Although there are sites that cope successfully with the trends and criteria of online journalism, the general impression is of something outdated and provincial.

Design

Often newspaper websites imitate the printed paper without interactive elements or pictures while others adopt an exaggerated style with unaesthetic colors and without a logical line and a clear concept. From this point of view and taking into account the rules of the genre, the websites of the newspapers *ECO*, *Glasul Națiunii*, *Jurnal de Chișinău*, *Kișiniovskie*

Novosti, *Literatura și Artă*, *Moldova Suverană*, *Timpul* and *Unghiul* and of the magazines *Aquarelle*, *Punkt*, *VIP Magazin* and *Vremea Remonta* comply—some more and some less—with the latest trends and criteria.

Current and Dynamic

Online media by definition should be the most dynamic. The language is specific, their deadlines are mobile and their articles never end as they are continuously updated. There are no editions and no limits, just a continuous flow of information.

The websites of our publications are, however, as I mentioned above, electronic versions of the printed editions. The texts are not adapted for online versions; many sites are stuck in time and on a date long past. In fact, some newspaper websites feature front page information that is a few months or even years old.

A few websites show the current date and hour (*Commerçant Plus*, *ECO*, *Jurnal de Chișinău*, *KP*, *Moldova Suverană*, *Observatorul de Nord*, *Punkt* and *Unghiul*). This information makes the site timely, especially if the publication is not a daily or does not renew its content daily.

Accessibility

Simplicity and functionality are the watchwords on the Internet. The site must be structured in such a way that navigation is not a burden or an adventure for users. Each site wants to be unique and original, but sometimes too much originality is bad. In certain situations it is more advisable to follow classic standards. It may not seem very innovative if the navigation menu is on the upper left-hand side of the page, but that is exactly where the user expects to find it and changing it to a different spot creates confusion. For example, the navigation menu is missing on the front page of the newspaper *Commerçant Plus* and is accessible only on the inside pages and on the right side.

Most websites do not have an active logo which creates hardship because it is easier to access the logo and return to the first page than to look for "home" or "front page" which are usually written in a very small font. A similar problem is also that of headings that are not active. The user must instead hunt for the word "continuation" in small letters that is frequently hidden at the end of the teaser.

The websites of Moldovan publications are part of a very small virtual community as the information they offer is accessible only to those who speak Romanian or Russian. There are only three sites that target the wider public. The magazine *Contrafort* offers a short presentation in English on its front page. *Ziarul de Gardă* has an English version where visitors can find a short presentation on the newspaper followed by headings with introductions to articles, but one must subscribe to be able to read the entire article. The English language page does not present any dates or names; the articles published there do not correspond with those in the Romanian version. *Fin Consultant* is the only publication that offers a complete version in English.

As to accessibility, *Glasul Națiunii* gets an extra point for offering users the chance to select the font size they prefer, i.e., small, medium or large.

Texts

Online texts, besides having a specific language, must also observe a number of other rules that are important for easier navigation: use subheadings; spaces between paragraphs; characters should not be too small and the horizontal rows should not be too long. The websites that meet these criteria, again, more or less, are the following: www.aif.md, www.eko.md, www.jurnal.md, www.km.press.md, www.kn.md, www.moldova-suverana.md, www.punkt.md, www.vipmagazin.md and www.vedomosti.md.

Structuring the Information

Although *Ziarul de Gardă* complies with many of the above-mentioned criteria, it loses points on structuring the information on its front page. In online journalism, texts are not laid out in columns as this is strictly newspaper style.

The website of the newspaper *Literatura și Artă* also has problems in this category as the most recent information in the events section in the center of the page is one month old. The section titled Cultural Patrimony on the upper right-hand side gives an overview of Moldovan fortresses and monasteries that is useful information, but it is static. Readers can find the only current information (newspaper headings updated weekly) on the lower right-hand side of the page.

Pictures

Pictures are something of a luxury for the websites of our publications. Some have pictures on the front page only, while others have only black and white pictures or very small ones of poor quality. The websites that do have them seem to lack

a photo policy: some articles have pictures, others do not (the general ratio being one with to three or four without); some pictures are active, others are not, and a good picture can be next to one of poor quality. The websites of lifestyle magazines are the best in this category as are the following newspapers: *ECO*, *Glasul Națiunii*, *Jurnal de Chișinău*, *KP* and *Nezavisimaia Moldova*.

Interactive Elements

Internet implies a permanent connection among users, an intense circulation and exchange of information. You have the feeling, however, on the websites of Moldovan newspapers that you are alone. None of the sites offers links to similar subjects on the same site or on other sites at the end of the articles, and very few recommend other sites or provide links to them. One can find the “recommend/send this article” option only on www.eko.md, www.jurnal.md and www.punkt.md. Furthermore, many websites do not give the users the option to comment on the articles though a few let visitors interact in a discussion forum or leave their impressions in the guest book/feedback section. An interactive element that is most frequently found on the websites of our publications is the survey.

Multimedia

A strongly marked tendency in the field is to have multimedia content, i.e., a combination of text, pictures, video, audio and interactive elements. Of our publications, *VIP Magazin* is the only one that manages to have any, but it doesn't cover all possibilities. Visitors can view a few short films in its video section grouped in two categories: history of *VIP Magazin* and team of *VIP Magazin*. Both are of good quality and speed.

Online Services

Options in this category are almost non-existent. The web feeds function, which is not a novelty in virtual space anymore, is missing from 30 of the 35 websites we reviewed. Only www.eko.md, www.jurnal.md, www.km.press.md, www.literaturasiarta.md and www.unghiul.com have this function. Only *Punkt* magazine offers an electronic bulletin, and subscribing online to newspapers and magazines is still impossible. Website versions for cell phones are yet to come.

Audiovisual Media

The database of www.mediavoice.impact.md lists 41 TV stations—12 in Chișinău—and 41 radio station—26 in Chișinău. On the global network, we found only 4 TV sta-

tions from Chişinău (plus another 4 that are not included in the database) and one from the provinces (SorTV). As for radio stations, we found 9 from Chişinău (plus 2 not included in the database and 2 having their websites currently designed) and one from the provinces (Radio Sângera). Although the audiovisual sites look better graphically than those of the print media, when it comes to content, too few sites follow the trends and criteria of the genre. The main ingredient—interactivity—is missing, especially in the case of the TV stations.

The most vivid and interactive sites are those of Kiss FM and Radio Noroc, and they are also the only stations that can be listened to online. Micul Samaritean can also be listened to online, but its site contains nothing more than an online player. As for the rest, if you want old information try Nashe Radio, for inactive buttons go to Fresh Fm and Hit FM, for non-functional options hit forum on www.hitfm.md online Radio Moldova and for video or audio files that download extremely slowly Radio Noroc and Vocea Basarabiei are your best bets. Only Nashe Radio and Radio Noroc tell their visitors what they can listen to at any given moment. They are also the only two that offer online chats (at www.nashe.md and www.radionoroc.md). Audio files can be downloaded from Vocea Basarabiei and from the websites of BBC radio stations (www.bbc.co.uk/romanian) and Europa Liberă (www.europalibera.org).

The websites of Moldova's TV stations accurately represent our television programming: they are completely dull. One can find current news only on www.tv7.md, www.protv.md, and www.tvc21.md. As for the rest, the "news" is several days or weeks old or is only information about the station and its programs. These sites look like electronic publications with texts and pictures. There are some modest, scattered interactive elements on a few of them though. TV 7, TVC 21 and DTV offer discussion forums, DTV and TVC 21 post the current date and DTV has web feeds. That's it though. There are no online video files.

Press Agencies

Unlike print and audiovisual media, press agencies are the only classic media institutions in our country that fit relatively well in virtual space. Although they cannot compare, for instance, to www.reuters.com or to www.afp.com, the vast majority of the websites of Moldovan press agencies have a comfortable aspect and a practical, clear design. All agencies provide the information on their sites in three languages—Romanian, Russian and English—except Noutăți Moldova (<http://newsmoldova.md>) which doesn't have English.



The web page of Deca Press News Agency was awarded the second prize within the contest WebTop 2006, Mass Media category.

Nonetheless, not even our press agencies can cope with the novelties of the Internet. Besides the news and pictures, which we must admit are good quality, the agencies' websites have only a few interactive elements: useful links, feedback, forums, surveys and the options to print or send material. The Internet is open space where information circulates freely, and today's news is tomorrow's history, but the sites of our press agencies are not really up to date. In this business, staying current is a must, but web feeds are offered only by Interlic, none of the agencies has developed a version of their sites for cell phones and video and audio files are not available online except on the website of Media Impact. The main products of Media Impact are videos (reports, interviews, surveys) that it distributes to local TV stations and that can also be accessed on www.impact.md.

Information Websites and Portals

As newspaper websites are updated only after the papers appear on newsstands and press agencies offer limited free news on their sites, the digests on information websites and portals are a practical alternative for Internet users interested in Moldova. The best sources are <http://news.yam.ro>, Moldova-Azi (www.azi.md) and Unimedia (www.unimedia.md). While <http://news.yam.ro> just collects news from the websites of press agencies and presents it in a continuous flow, the other two sites are more complex. www.azi.md offers news from agencies but also offers an assortment of its own information products like interviews, investigations, reports, studies, expert commentaries in the weekly comments section pictures in the weekly pictures section and declarations in the daily tribune section, all grouped by category. All information is available in Romanian, Russian and English. Articles can also be printed, but unfortunately [azi.md](http://www.azi.md) does not offer other options and services, and its forum is inactive.

The website of Unimedia is only in Romanian, and it does not offer too many information products of its own. It does have online services and interactive elements though. You can cre-

ate a personal account on the site and manage your own database (“my articles”) and each article can be printed, recommended and commented on. Also, users can subscribe to the electronic bulletin offered by Unimedia, manage and select the news on the site by rss feeds and can read news on their mobiles via wap. Their information products worth mentioning are “MD in the Foreign Press” and “Press Reviews” which features categories like politics and economy but which has not been updated for two months.

A few selective news items can also be found on large web portals such as port.md (Romanian), allmoldova.md (Russian and English) and point.md (Russian).

Online Publications

The number of these specialized publications can be counted on your fingers: www.eurojournal.org, a publication of the Center for European Studies of Moldova (English); www.iatp.md/lanternamagica, a publication on Moldovan art and culture (Romanian and English); www.curaj.net, an information and opinion publication (Romanian); www.ladyclub.md, the first online women’s magazine in Moldova (Romanian) and <http://allfun.md/> (Russian), a website dedicated to cultural and social news.

An interesting project is the Internet newspaper *Press Obozrenie* (<http://press.try.md>). It’s a Russian language publication and the first of its kind in Moldova. It has a variety of sections and is available in wap and pda versions for cell phones, and the news flow is continuously updated.

Blogs

Unlike online publications, blogs are not a rarity at all. Anyone who thinks that he or she has something to say or who simply wants to be present on the web can very easily create a blog. They are booming in virtual space. Nonetheless, the newspaper *Contrafort* is the only one that recommends blogs to its readers (those of Vasile Gârneț and Vitalie Ciobanu) though this is already a current practice for Western mass media websites.

A blog by definition is a kind of personal site, but we are not talking about those used by their owners as online diaries (more or less intimate) or to share their creations (photos, graphics, literature) or their preferences (pictures with stars, music). Many bloggers address topics of general interest, post useful information or propose debates. Several blogs discuss social/political events in Moldova and thus constitute an alternate source of information. Among these are <http://petterg.blog.com> (the blog of the journalist Petru Terguță which contains video reports he produces for the information program “Cotidian” on TV 7); <http://publicpolicywatch.blogspot.com> (the blog’s author invites her visitors to discuss various public policies in Moldova and in the rest of the world); <http://voceamoldovei.blogspot.com> (according to the author, the Guardian, you will find the uncensored truth about Moldova and read what many think but don’t say); <http://www.popovici.us> (EuroBlog is Val Popovici’s blog) and <http://npopescu.yam.ro> (Nicu Popescu’s incoherent blog). They all cross-reference each other, so it is very easy for visitors to navigate Moldova’s blogosphere by topic or by personal interest.

Dumitrița BUTNARU
20 mai 2007

Donor Support to Moldovan Media: The European Union Should Take the Leading Role

There has been little progress in improving the situation of Moldovan mass media. Foreign donors have played an important role, but so far there has not been enough support. The European Union (EU) through the European Commission Delegation could take a leading role, but other donors should follow and be more active. Much remains to be done.

Types of Donors and Support

Considering Moldova's history of high levels of poverty, donor involvement has been limited; however, with the latest EU enlargement and the fact that Moldova is now a neighbouring country to the EU, the international community, bilateral organisations and NGOs (especially from EU member states) have begun to pay more attention to the country.

At the beginning of 2007, the EU TACIS-program was phased out and replaced by the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI). More financial and technical support was promised to Moldova, and ensuring respect for freedom of media is one of the priorities in the Action Plan. This could be taken as indication that media institutions, NGOs and journalists will receive more direct support from the EU.

Surprisingly, so far little direct support for media institutions has come from the EU, nor has the EU outlined a specific plan for how to realize the emphasis in the Action Plan. Support in this area has instead been provided by individual member states through bilateral assistance and support for individual projects and organisations, among them Sweden (through Sida), the Netherlands through their Embassy in Kiev, the UK Embassy and DFID and the German Embassy. A number of embassies and organisations from other countries outside the EU are also supporting media activities. The most active ones are the US Embassy, the Soros Foundation-Moldova, Council of Europe, Network Media Program, OSF-London, The Eurasia Foundation, OSCE Mission, UNDP, Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) and UNICEF. In general the donors focus on supporting different

kinds of work with media outlets and journalists as well as with NGOs operating in media field.

A few organisations and embassies are providing considerable but sporadic support, for example Press Now, Art. 19, National Endowment for Democracy, SDC, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen "Media-Im-Pakt," World Bank, The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bucharest and the Canadian Embassy in Bucharest.¹

The adoption of the new Audiovisual Code in 2006 saw an increase in donor support to the broadcast sector. During the adoption process, some organizations were clearly more active than others, especially in terms of the legal and political aspects. The most prominent were Council of Europe, OSCE and Article 19, which according to Moldovan media experts all did a great job in addressing their problems. In addition, the US Embassy financed long-term monitoring of the content of public TV and radio. The Soros Foundation with support from Sida also made an effort by supporting, for example, four debates on the draft code.

It is worth noting that support for short-term projects, and particularly short-term training, is more common than support for long-term projects. This might contribute to the professional development of individuals, but it is unlikely to target the underlying problems of Moldova's media climate. Liliana Vitu, Programme Communications Officer at the Eurasia Foundation says, "In general, the donors seem to support projects in which the result can be delivered soon. The donors should not only focus on training courses. It could be worth investing in more costly projects with a long-term impact."

During the last 12 years, the Independent Journalism Center has organized many short-term training programs that have not had the impact expected. The lack of professionalism among Moldovan journalists has been mentioned as a problem by both Moldovan and international organisations. That was also the main reason why the Independent Journalism Center decided to create the Chişinău School of Advanced

1. Press Now and Article 19 are international NGOs, not donors. They get involved even if they do not have money per say. For example, Article 19 does legal analysis and Press Now comes regularly to Moldova.

Journalism. With financial and in-kind support from donors such as MATRA through Press Now, the Missouri School of Journalism, the French Embassy through CFPJ-International in Paris and the US Embassy, there is now the possibility to educate journalists over a longer period.² The Peace Building Project, which brought together journalists from Gagauz Yeri Autonomous Region and other regions of Moldova is another example of a successful long-term project. This project was a three-year initiative aiming to contribute to development through a range of activities designed to support conflict resolution in Moldova. The activities related to journalists were implemented by IJC and financed by DFID. Currently there is an on-going tendering process for new activities in this area. For more information, go to www.peacebuilding.md.

Lack of Support and Donor Coordination

Numerous reports have stated that there has been little progress in improving the media climate in Moldova. It is not reaching a sufficient standard, although the situation is better than that of neighbouring countries such as Belarus. Ironically, if the situation in Moldova were worse, it would probably have been easier to attract the attention of foreign donors. Presently, there are too many other areas like reducing poverty and preventing human trafficking that are seen as in more urgent need of support. Hence the situation of the media has been subordinated to these other problems.

However, a series of events in 2006 starting with the adoption of the Audiovisual Code and followed by the reorganization of the two audiovisual institutions, Antena C and Euro TV showed that there are alarming tendencies in the government's dealings with the media. Mass media is one of the fundamental pillars of a democracy, and what happened last year indeed inhibits Moldova's chances to develop into a country with European standards.

According to the "Euromonitor Report" produced jointly by the Expert Group and the Association for Participatory Democracy (ADEPT), the lack of media freedom is one of the major obstacles for Moldova's European integration. With this in mind, it is hard to see why the EU is not playing a more active role though the possibility for the EU and other donors to support media is not always evident. Most donors are working according to the Paris Declaration of 2005 and are bound to coordinate their activities according to the recipient government's priorities.³ Many of them also provide part or all of their support directly to the government and do not

run their own projects. Another reason may be that donors do not categorize media as an independent sector but instead consider it part of other sectors. Cristina Mosneaga, Project Manager at the EC Delegation says, "Part of the answer to why the EC doesn't have a clear media strategy is that the media is tackled as part of civil society issues. We do support media but through NGO programmes." Further information on these programmes can be found at <http://www.delmda.ec.europa.eu>. Moldova can also participate in the EU's Media 2007 Programme—http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/media/overview/2007/index_en.htm— though this is very costly as participating countries have to contribute financially.

Ms. Mosneaga also identified other problems with the EC's mission to Moldova, "...for example, the fact that there is decentralisation and the delegation is still under the Kiev office."⁴ Some things are still unclear and the delegation in Chişinău does not make all the decisions yet. The relation between the EC and the government is also complex. The EC can't just come to a country and say what we want to do. First there has to be a discussion and to be honest, media has never been mentioned as a priority for the government." In other words, to date media seems to be perceived as Moldova's internal affair and as a too sensitive political issue.

One effect of the EU enlargement is that Moldova is often viewed as a part of a region along with neighbouring countries, and that is why some donors decide to initiate projects more on a regional level. Angela Sirbu, a member of the Media Working Group (MWG) created in 2002 as a part of Stability Pacts Media Task Force⁵ explains why the group is not as active as it was before 2005. One of MWG's responsibilities is to identify media development projects and recommend them to the Stability Pact for funding. "The Stability Pact's role has diminished with EU enlargement and because its approach has changed. Instead of requesting projects from countries, the pact will initiate regional projects in the areas where there are problems."

The lack of coordination among donors could explain why the support that is given does not have a larger impact. Elisabetta Plebani from Press Now admits that there is no real coordination; rather, there are informal consultations that are not always systematic. However, when the organizations need to talk to each other, they know where to find each other. This lack of coordination is not always due to unwillingness but also to a lack of time. Ms. Plebani also says, "I want to say honestly for the sake of understanding media development

2. Knight International Press Fellowship Program, OSCE, British Embassy and SCOOP have also provided support to the school.

3. The text of the Paris Declaration can be found at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf>

4. The EC Delegation to Chişinău opened in October 2006

5. <http://www.glm.md/default.asp?Lang=En>



The Press Club meeting, May 3rd, 2007.

The participants discuss the quality of instruction for young journalists.

Tudor Darie, Young Journalist Center from Moldova; Gheorghe Barsan, dean of Journalism and Public Communication Department at European Studies University from Moldova; Tatiana Corai, Deputy Editor-In-Chief, Timpul de Dimineata daily.

work, one weak point is that generally NGOs work in various countries. That has its advantages for regional development, but at the same time there is no time or space for perfectly tackling each country's problems. I am sure that there is inefficiency that we all could avoid, but that it is in some way part of the way we work."

Other organisations have other sorts of restrictions on what they can actually do. "Even if somebody would give us more money, we would not be able to run bigger and longer projects since we are not a donor agency but first of all a diplomatic mission," says Claus Neukirch, Press Officer at the OSCE Mission to Moldova.

Still, there are those who think that the donors could do a lot more. Liliana Vitu says, "The diplomatic community needs to be more pro-active. Now they seem to observe the authorities and then react. They should find other ways to prevent the actions taken by the government. There has to be a carrot and stick approach. After the EU Moldova Action Plan was signed, EU embassies to Moldova and the EC Delegation issued a couple of statements, but they were quite limited and did not press for action. No serious measures were taken to put the Moldovan authorities under pressure to undertake real reforms at Teleradio Moldova and media in general."

Since last year, international organisations and embassies have signed several joint statements where they expressed their concerns about the existing media climate and urged

concerned bodies of Moldova to take all necessary steps to change the situation. The last one was signed on Press Freedom Day. It is of course an important step, but at the same time it is important to point out that only a few of them contribute significant support. The Joint Statement on the Occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2007 was signed by 15 embassies and international organisations, but only OSCE, the UK Embassy, the Turkish Embassy (through TICA), the Council of Europe and the US Embassy contribute significant support.

The Relationship between Donors and Moldovan Beneficiaries

Despite the attention that the Audiovisual Code and the reorganization of Antena C and Euro TV received from international organisations, no specific grants were given to the journalists in question. According to John Balian, Press Officer, US Embassy, the journalists were made an offer to write a project, but after that nothing happened. "We invited them to apply for grants, but so far we haven't heard anything. We can't promise anything, but we're open to suggestions. Bring them!"

Thus, the lack of direct support to the media stems not only from a lack of interest or restrictions amongst donors but also from a lack of capacity of journalists and media organisations. The overall impression is that cooperation between foreign donors and Moldovan NGOs is good. The donors are mostly satisfied with the work carried out by

the NGOs, but some of them stress that there sometimes is passivity when it comes to initiating projects. "It's important to remember that we can only offer grants; we can't write the projects," says Aurelia Spataru at the Soros Foundation. An additional problem is the relatively small number of active NGOs. "Many NGOs are passive; we work only with the active ones," adds Spataru. To find reliable partners to cooperate with takes time and effort on the part of the donor which might explain why basically the same NGOs appear on various donor lists of beneficiaries. An active NGO with a good reputation naturally becomes a more attractive partner.

It is of course up to the NGOs and other beneficiaries to take advantage of opportunities and to initiate projects. At the same time it is one of the donors' responsibilities to make sure that the information about applying for opportunities is available to everyone interested. In fact, in many cases donor websites do not provide information on the duration of projects or the amount awarded. In addition, last year OSCE made an attempt to collect data for a matrix mapping all the support for the media in Moldova, but not all of the organisations involved responded. Not only does this lack of information make it difficult to detect overlaps and gaps, it is also problematic from a democratic point of view in that Moldova's citizens do not have easy access to information on who supports what media in the country.

The Future

Moldovan media has a long way to go before it reaches the top of the freedom of expression charts and before it will

be fully transformed to European standards. There is no doubt that there is enough to work on; the problem is rather how the donors should channel their activities. In order to optimize the support given it is extremely important that the donors coordinate their activities. The first step to improving coordination would be to provide more complete information, for example, in a comprehensive overview. Donors should also learn from the mistakes made in places like the Balkans, where the lack of coordination has been mentioned as a problem.⁶ It is also important that the donors support media in such way that it develops naturally so that it can become self-sustainable and not too dependent on foreign support.

In any case, it is clear that the EU, through the EC Delegation could take the lead in showing the way forward, but other donors should follow. Once decentralisation is complete, the EC Delegation to Moldova should be able to make its own decisions. To support the media is fundamental because it is a tool for spreading information on European integration.

To sign joint statements is of course an important step, but at the same time donors have to take concrete measures. Giving an increased amount of money or in-kind support particularly to long-term projects would have a greater impact. Finally, all donors and organisations should push harder for a change in the legislative framework to help the authorities better understand what freedom of expression actually means. Change itself is a long-term project, but as John Balian points out, "You might not see changes in 10 years, but all together we will be able to make some."

By Malin Wikstrom FAGERBERG

6. See www.birn.eu.com and "Poor Donor Strategy Doomed Projects in Bosnia," "Media Cannot Survive on Donations Alone," "Donors-Partly Guilty," and "Evaluating Our Efforts."

The Republic of Moldova as Seen by the Foreign Press (March 2006–2007)

The Country's Image and Mass Media

Moldova's image abroad has increasingly been a topic in the speeches and analyses of politicians and ordinary people in recent years. Sixteen years after independence, the importance of creating and promoting a strong, distinctive national image has become both obvious and pronounced. Presently, the country does not have a well-defined strategy to promote its image abroad, so the way we are perceived on the outside is generally the result of statements made by Moldovan politicians at high-level international forums or of our leaders' behavior and actions at events involving our country.

One factor that helps to create a country's image is undoubtedly mass media. With its capacity for rapid dissemination and broad coverage, it represents a force that can truly build but also destroy a country's image internationally. Mass media has turned into an informal political actor that is taken into account by all formal self-respecting political actors regardless of their country of origin and its position in the international arena.

Voluntarily or involuntarily, media has become the main image promoter and cultivator for nations. The press is a convenient and accessible source for helping people everywhere to create an image about any country on the globe as it covers a large spectrum of events out of interest, out of curiosity or for other reasons. It can highlight countries and people about which the public knows and speaks very little and can do it very effectively. It can also through silence keep a country in obscurity.

The Republic of Moldova has been a member of the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe since 1992, of the Council of Europe since 1995, a direct neighbor of NATO since 2004 and of the European Union since 1 January 2007, but it does not have a distinct, precise international image nor a concrete strategy for creating one. As proof, we present a few articles about Moldova that have appeared in the foreign press in the past 15 months.

Gas War and Wine War

The year 2006 was marked by two so-called wars: the gas war and the wine war. One of the most important Spanish newspapers, *El País*, published no fewer than five articles on

the gas war, and Moldova was directly referred to in the title of one of them ("Russia Leaves Ukraine and Moldova without Gas while Supplies to Eastern Europe Decrease" *El País*, 01-01-2006). In the other articles, Moldova is only mentioned; the content concentrates on Russia and the problem itself but not on Moldova. *The Baltic Times* published an article on the same topic in a special issue on 7 June 2006 in which Moldova is only mentioned among Russia's victims. So while the natural gas conflict between Russia and its neighbors was a favorite topic for the international press at the beginning of 2006, the main topic was not Moldova.

In the case of the wine war, the foreign press referred directly to Moldova and to Georgia. The German newspaper *Die Presse* published the article "Moldova on Verge of Catastrophe" on 25 May 2006. The author, Martin Kugler, describes the situation resulting from the embargo imposed by Russia in a manner favorable to Moldova. Although he mentions that the country has the smallest gross domestic product (GDP) in Europe and a crisis economy, Moldova is not labeled as the poorest country on the continent as has been done in other publications. The author ends his article with the following thought, "Moldovans have recently won a moral victory: Moldovan wines won 10 gold medals at an exhibition in Russia, and they also serve Moldovan wine in the Kremlin." This invokes the image of a small country with a precarious economy but with indisputable wealth—its wine.

The article "Russia Refuses to End Wine War" published in the London newspaper *The Telegraph* is written in the same style. This article treats both Moldova and Georgia as Russia's victims. The author mentions the fact that Queen Elizabeth prefers Moldovan wines and the importance of this product for Moldova's national economy. In the article "Russia Blocks Alcohol Imports from Neighbours" that came out in the English paper *The Guardian* on 13 April 2006, Moldova is mentioned but Russia and Georgia are the main topics. Readers learn only that Moldova is a country that fights poverty by selling cheap wine and cognac to Russia and that Russia is taking revenge for the economic blockade imposed by Moldova on Transnistria. Our country remains in the background while author Tom Parfitt focuses on Georgia. Moldova is also barely mentioned in the article "Russia Demands More Bulgarian Wine" published on 18 May 2006 in *The Sofia Echo*. The Armenian publication *Open Armenia* also featured

an article entitled “Chişinău and Tbilisi Search for Way Out of Wine Crisis” on 16 April 2006.

The article by Lorraine Millot in the French paper *Liberation* on 28-29 October 2006, on the other hand, is entirely dedicated to Moldova. Entitled “Moldova’s Wine Industry Has Been Sad since Russia is Hard to Please,” the article was written in Cricova and the author describes what she saw on the spot, cites the workers and management of Acorex Wine Holding, describes the problem between Moldova and Russia at the beginning of 2006 and leaves it to the reader to continue the story at the end. Georgia is mentioned only once in brackets as part of the same equation. This article is written in a manner typical of the French press when it writes about Moldova, i.e., preference is given to features in which the authors describe actual realities in detail, that do not speculate or use irony in an exaggerated way and that do not take information out of context. Even titles of articles are more positive in the French and francophone press.

Transnistria and Human Trafficking

Skimming the foreign press, I had the impression that broadly speaking, if it were not for the Transnistrian conflict, nobody would write anything about our country. The years 2006 and 2007 were full of articles about Transnistria including about the referendum of 17 September 2006: France had approximately 16 articles, Germany 5, Spain 9, Great Britain 9, Bulgaria 2, Baltic States 1 and the USA 2. Traditionally, journalists referring to this subject highlight the strange aspect of the conflict that has lasted for over a decade, i.e., the region’s relationship with the Russian Federation, the illegal acts committed in the territory which is not recognized internationally, the lack of security on Moldova’s eastern border and the difficult relations between the separatist region and the state. The foreign press in a few cases presented facts but generally preferred analysis and commentary. This in our opinion shows increased interest in the subject.

The referendum of 17 September 2006 put Transnistria back onto the pages of foreign newspapers and reminded the international public about the seriousness of the conflict. The vast majority of articles published on this topic conveyed the same message: the “frozen” conflict in the eastern part of Moldova represents one of the biggest obstacles to its development as well as to its integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations. Articles taken from the Russian press, however, expressed opinions contrary to those generally accepted internationally. Such an article appeared in the 18–24 January 2007 issue of the French magazine *Courier International*. Entitled “Transnistria: Survival under Embargo,” it came from the Russian magazine *Ogoniok* and expressed the pro-Transnistrian and

pro-Russian point of view regarding the referendum, the economic blockade imposed by Moldova last year and the daily life of Transnistrians. Another article entitled “In Transnistria, [Moldovans’] Love for Big Russia is Taught in School” appeared in *Liberation* on 25 January 2007. The authors convey both sides of the issue. One part begins, “It is incredible to what extent in 16 years of unrecognized independence the Transnistrian population has managed to maintain the spirit of unification with Russia. [...] Actually, what will happen to these people in a Romanian (Latin) world that is alien to them, they being Russian speaking?” In contrast, the other part starts, “It is 1.30 PM in the town of Grigoriopol located in the east of Moldova: the school for the children who want to study in their language and write using the Latin alphabet starts at the bus station.”

Many articles on Moldova in the international press deal with human trafficking, prostitution, migration, poverty and organ harvesting, subjects that undoubtedly tarnish the country’s image. These subjects frequently appear in the context of Transnistria, but there are also articles referring directly to Moldova. During the period of investigation, human trafficking and related topics in Moldova were covered by the press in France in approximately 6 articles, in Germany in 2, in Italy in 1, in Spain in 8 and in Great Britain in 5. The sobriquet “the poorest country in Europe” is ordinarily attributed to Moldova in such articles, and the situation in which Moldovan citizens find themselves compelled to sell their organs in order to survive is described in a painful and unbearably true way. An article published in the Italian paper *La Repubblica* on 4 June 2006 began, “It all started in Mingir, a place located 120 kilometers from Chişinău in a very poor region of poor Moldova. Mingir has become famous in recent years for practicing a very special industry: organ harvesting, especially kidneys...” The article was entitled “A Kidney for Funding the Trip to Italy” and describes one example of a Moldovan searching for work abroad and the risk of being caught and deported. The material is shockingly descriptive and direct; articles in the Spanish and German press are edited in the same style.

In contrast, French and American media show leniency towards Moldova when referring to trafficking. In this context we mention the reports “Trafficking in Women in Moldova” broadcast by the French TV channel TF1 on 29 December 2006 and “Human Trafficking in Moldova” broadcast by ABC News (USA) on 9 March 2007. These brief reports show the extremely violent conditions in which young Moldovan women are forced to prostitute themselves. Although tough and very unpleasant, they concentrate on the problem of prostitution and trafficking in women and do not focus on the country. Nonetheless, they do not help to create a positive image of Moldova abroad.

Romania and the European Union

When it was decided in 2006 that Romania would join the EU and since the beginning of 2007 when Romania actually joined, there have been a lot of articles about Romania and Moldova and Moldova and the EU. The foreign press has been curious about how things have been unfolding after 1 January 2007. News, features and comments on Moldova's aspirations, the East-West dilemma and Moldova's relations with Romania appeared in the French press approximately 18 times, in the German press 8, in the English press 15, in the Armenian press 2, in the Swiss press 4, in the American press 3, in the Bulgarian press once and in the Baltic press 3 times. Even though Moldova does not appear in the most positive of contexts, the fact that it is written about in articles about Europe or the EU is in our opinion advantageous. A sampling of titles includes the following: "Hundreds of Thousands of Moldovans Prefer to be Romanians" (*Der Spiegel*), "Moldova's European Aspirations" (*Liberation*), "300,000 Moldovans could be Searching for Jobs in Europe" (*The Telegraph*), "Bulgaria to Support Moldova for European Integration" (*Sofia Echo*), "Poverty and EU Neighbor Moldova" (Reuters). Some of the articles regard Moldova as a victim with no chance of joining the EU and criticize the country for its duplicitous policies. Others describe the sad situation in which ordinary citizens found themselves on 1 January 2007 when visas were required by Romania and the EU border reached the Prut River. Moldova again found itself involved in significant geopolitical interests, and when powers such as Russia, the EU and occasionally the USA are involved, the international press cannot ignore the subject.

Other Topics

In the past 15 months, the international press has also referred to Moldova in the following contexts: bird flu; the

Bologna process; Eurovision 2006 and 2007; tourism and sports. Moldova also appeared in world rankings for competitiveness of the tourism sector (95 of 124), for corruption (81 of 163), for functioning democracy (it ranked faulty at the end of 2006), for press freedom (85 of 168 compared with 74 in 2005), economic freedom (81 of 157) and overall freedom (it was ranked partially free in 2007).

Conclusions

Based on this study, Moldova's visibility in the foreign press is the result of events affecting the country and is not supported or based on an internal strategy for promoting the country's image abroad. Most of the articles mentioning our country are on subjects that to a certain extent interest and refer to other international actors. During the study period, Moldova never made the front page of a foreign newspaper but was mostly widely covered in September 2006, the favorite topic being, of course, Transnistria, and in the beginning of 2007 when the topic of the EU bordering Moldova was popular. In the same context, we would like to mention that Transnistria sometimes seems to be the only topic of interest to the foreign press. In conclusion, we would also like to note that the mainly negative contexts in which our country is described currently prevail over the positive ones which makes it more difficult to create and promote a positive, distinctive image abroad.

We would also like to add that the Romanian, Ukrainian and Russian press were not included in our research because the great number of articles that would include Moldova requires a separate study. Nevertheless, Transnistria is the favorite subject in these papers as well, especially in the Ukrainian press. The Romanian press refers more to the Moldovan-Romanian relations, to visa requirements and to joining the EU.

Aneta GONȚA

Numbers in Journalism

There are people who love numbers. This is one reason why journalists can be considered people. They have a number for almost anything: for James Bond it's 007, for the ideal size of a woman it's 90-60-90, for short conversations it's 2 seconds, and for the moment that marked the transition from the second to the third millennium it's 9/11/01.

It often seems to media professionals that if numbers did not exist, something would be missing, and that the something missing would be facts that allow readers to make conclusions. I found the clearest example of this in these two excerpts from sports reports reproduced in the book *Truth, Lies and Advertising* by Jon Steel.

TIGERS WIN AND AVOID LAST PLACE

The Orioles have lost 5 out of their last 6 games including 3 in a row to the Tigers. Mike Massina (7 wins/ 3 losses) gave up 4 runs and 10 hits in 6 innings. It's the 8th time he has led off against Detroit.

Belcher (3 wins/ 8 losses) gave up 4 hits and 3 walks and struck out 3 players. "On the field he did not seem to be a 2 and 8 pitcher but rather an 8 and 2 pitcher," Massina commented.

Detroit won 10 to 0 after scoring 6 runs in the 7th inning due to a costly error by Rafael Palmeiro at first base who ended his run of 161 consecutive games without an error. (excerpt from *The San Francisco Chronicle*)

ROSEBERRY BLOOMS WORKING HARD

It was a day with a cold wind and clenched fingers in the pockets, a day when the nerves are strained to the maximum, and the feet cannot quite stand the cold, a typically English day. The fierce fights among regional teams on hostile fields under clouds full of resentment have also been an integral part of English cricket, shattering the dreams of youth and weeding out ineptitude...

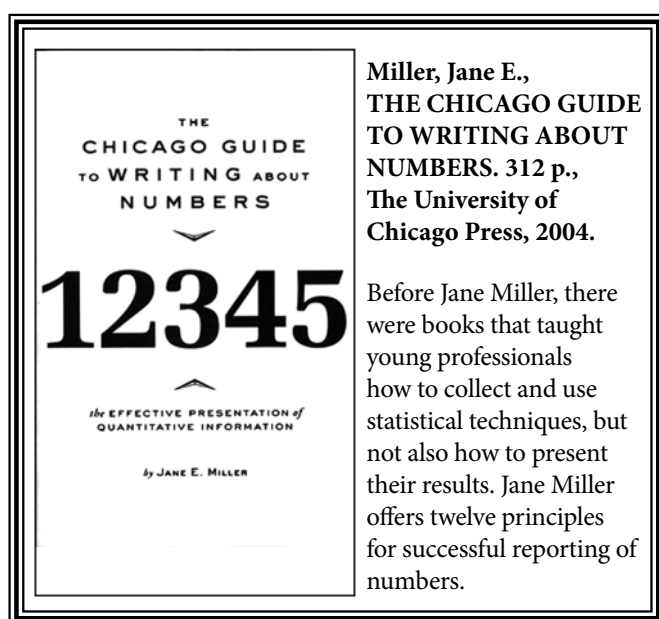
... His cricket career has been a pretty balanced one, occasionally spotted with errors, although he continues to be a good player. As he was leaving, it was hard to tell if he had got tired of himself, of the umpire, or of life. But he had indeed got tired of something, a rather unusual situation. (excerpt from *The Sunday Times*)

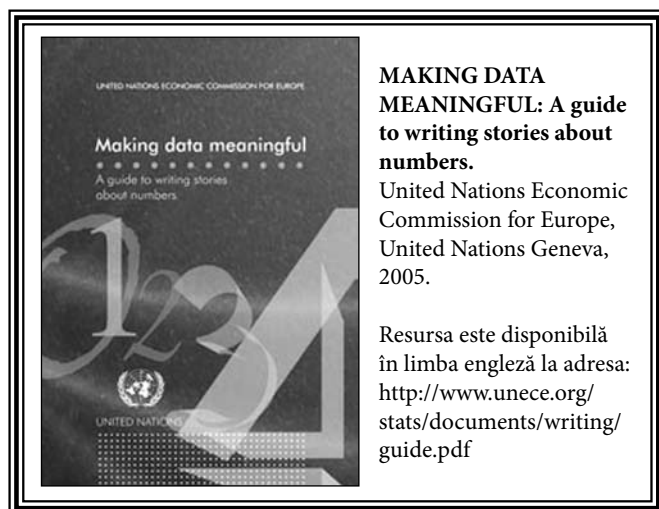
Numbers should be useful, not only correct: For example, 2001 is the sum of the square of 20, plus the square of 40, plus the square of 1. That's entirely correct, but not very useful. As Antoine de Saint-Exupery wrote in the *The Little Prince*, "Adults love numbers. This is what they like. Grownups like numbers. When you speak to them about a new friend, they never ask what is truly important. They never ask, 'How does his voice sound? What games does he prefer? Does he collect butterflies?' They ask, 'How old is he? How many brothers does he have? How much does he weigh? How much does his father earn?' Only then will they think that they have got to know him."

Numbers are about people: 269 meters in length, 1311 passengers, 153 kilometers south of Newfoundland, 14 April 1912, 500 stewards and cooks, 42°N and 49°-51°W, 4,000 meters deep. All these numbers outline a film about the Titanic. The film produced by James Cameron was tremendously successful despite the fact that everyone knew the ending for the exact reason that it presented an ordinary story with the ordinary people who were behind those numbers.

Good numbers compare: There are more TV sets in the United States than people in Great Britain. The design industry in Great Britain employs more people than British agriculture.

Numbers are only relevant in context: While it is always good to be first everywhere, some people can be happy with 83rd place if it's on the *Forbes Magazine* list of wealthy people.





To be attractive, numbers need warmth, magnetism and humanity: “I saw a woman once at a stall in the market whose hand-made whistles for calling birds were not selling.

So she changed her sign from ‘Bird Whistles \$2’ to ‘Drive People Crazy for only \$2,’ and she sold everything at once,” recalls Michael Newman, one of the most experienced and successful creative directors in the world.

When 30 years of war yield more than 500 years of peace: “Italy in the 30 years of the rule of the Borgia family had war, terror, crime and bloodshed but offered Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance to the world. Switzerland had fraternal love, 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did it give birth to? The cuckoo clock.” (Orson Welles).

And so I conclude that journalism is like math and that very good journalism is like higher math when one does not operate with numbers or concrete terms anymore; one operates with concepts and, by extension, with images. Take this example. Drinking a bottle of coke is the same as eating a stack of sugar cubes as tall as the bottle. Finding such images for important numbers is what quality journalism is about.

Igor GUZUN

Recommended Reading

- ❑ *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery.
- ❑ *Ten Practical Tips for Business and Economic Reporting in Developing Economies* by Paul Hemp, 1994.
- ❑ *Chelovecheskoye razvitie v zerkale statistiki. Kak Chitati Tzifry?* Wolf Skott, UNDP, Bratislava, 2006.
- ❑ “Numbers in Social Reporting” in *Social Reporting for Young Journalism Students*, Independent Journalism Center, Chişinău, 2002.
- ❑ “Numbers... Numbers...” in *Economic Journalism* by Vlad Ber-
- cu, Vasile Botnaru, Dumitru Calac, Artur Gorghencea, Arcadie Gherasim, Maria Graur-Vasilache, Association of Economic Journalists, 2003.
- ❑ “Problems with Numbers” in *The Man Especially* by Igor Guzun, Vsevolod Ciornei, Chişinău, 2005.
- ❑ “Your Press Release Has Not Reached Us Signed: Recycle Bin.” *Urma Ta*, No. 1, March 2007.
- ❑ “Making Statistics from News Human,” in *News* by Igor Guzun for the Independent Journalism Center, Chişinău, 2006.

Information or Illusion?

Although the Transnistrian media show more professionalism and objectivity in covering events on their side of Nistru than they did in the 1990s, they continue to use propaganda methods that aim at building a negative image of Chişinău.

Perception Creates Reality

If we were to say that most political processes take place in our minds, we would not be too far off. This is because we perceive events in the context of our ideas based on our assumptions and moral concepts. The way we understand what is happening in the world is most of the time more important than what is actually taking place. The way people perceive reality can be more important than reality itself and in the end can actually change it. These perceptions can be molded with the aid of striking pictures and images, symbols and rhetoric. That is why any regime that wants to control society seeks first of all to control mass media because through it they have an ideal means of influencing how the world is perceived. Marx and Engels said, "The ideas of the ruling class are the dominant ideas in any epoch." This is why mass media is both a tool of and an influential participant in the socio-political process.

When analyzing mass media, we must by all means take into account the fact that media reflects the socio-political situation of a country. As a rule, the media suffers from the same diseases as the society as a whole. In societies with open political regimes, the media and society interact: media informs society, and public opinion sets the tone for the themes and focus of the media. In Moldova, however, media on both banks of the Nistru is controlled by interest groups that use it to mold national thinking. This is especially true in Transnistria where media control is a condition for the survival of the leadership. After seizing power by force, they had to be recognized and resorted to manipulating public opinion with the aid of mass media. Now media is virtually the main means of legitimizing the Tiraspol regime and supporting its alienation from the Republic of Moldova.

Moldova from the Left Side of the Nistru

When analyzing the role and activity of the press on the left side of the Nistru in covering events on the right side, certain periods are distinguished by the goals set and the angles used. After the end of the hot phase of the conflict, the press on the left side served a group interested in demonizing "fascist"

Chişinău. This topic gradually lost public interest, and the need arose to consolidate the masses around the leadership in Tiraspol. The separatists at that point were mainly supported by Kazaks who were brought in for that special purpose, by the Russian 14th Army and by misguided Russian-speaking workers from the industrial complexes but not by the population as a whole. It very soon became obvious that the separatists did not have any idea how to mobilize the people against Chişinău in favor of Tiraspol. The situation grew more complicated when people from the left side started to come to the right side to shop, to find work or to visit relatives and friends, all of which worked as a unifying mechanism. In fact, the results of an opinion poll conducted in 1994 in Râbnîţa by a local newspaper indicated that 35% of the respondents thought that the Tiraspol regime was a criminal one. At the same time, the attention of the press on the left side to events on the right changed as tension between Chişinău and Tiraspol increased or decreased.

The media on the left side were used to strengthen the support of politically active citizens for the Tiraspol leadership and for discrediting Moldova's leadership, living standards, ideas and values. They directly participated in creating the myth that the Transnistrian people were a separate entity that was essentially Soviet. The media were also used to disseminate the separatists' version of the reasons for the Transnistrian conflict, reasons that were then used to justify Tiraspol's separation from Chişinău.

Evolution of the Information System

As time passed, politics on the left side of the Nistru underwent various changes. Those who were dissatisfied with the leadership detached themselves from Smirnov's group and created a rather fragile opposition. As chances of financial gains in business increased, other influential players appeared. Finally, external actors from Ukraine and Russia came on stage which led to an even more pronounced fragmentation of Smirnov's team and encouraged the establishment of new local influence groups independent of the Tiraspol leadership.

These new interest groups influenced the local media as well especially as political elites on both sides realized they would benefit from mutual cooperation. The attacks on Chişinău from the press on the left side of the Nistru then became much less aggressive. In response, Tiraspol resorted to occasionally creating tense situations to keep the populations estranged. The role of the media was decisive in this case as well.

Over the years, the mass media on the left side of the Nistru has developed and has accumulated experience and professionalism that has extended their influence. This in turn has resulted in fewer articles about Moldova and a greater focus on local news and improving the quality of its publications. At present, the Transnistrian press represents a rather varied mix. Its coverage of events on the right bank has undergone a significant change and is more skillful and more subtle in using propaganda.

The reasons given originally by Tiraspol for the conflict do not convince its citizens anymore which has served as an impetus to search for new ideas. In addition to the established tendency to cover events on the right bank in an unfavorable light, in order to discourage any desire for unification, other methods have been developed. First of all, Moldova's proposed integration into the European Union has received negative coverage which in turn has actually transformed Transnistrian mass media into on-site information centers for Russian mass media. Secondly, in order to maintain a pro-Russian spirit during the referendum last September, the Slavic affiliation of the population of Transnistria and propaganda about their Russian homeland were frequent subjects.

Taking advantage of the growing divergence between Russia and the West, the Transnistrian media have started declaring that reunifying the country is impossible allegedly due to the incompatibility of strategic purposes and orientations. The Transnistrian press focuses on the fact that Moldova wants to join the EU and NATO whereas Transnistria thinks prosperity lies with joining the Russian Federation. This is an obvious example of dividing the population into "us" and "them."

Although the Transnistrian mass media conveys facts accurately in most cases, they often contort their essence and falsely interpret them to the public. They also carefully select which information to publish and present usually just one point of view on Chişinău and on the politics of local officials, the one that criticizes. Here are some of the propaganda techniques most often used in the Transnistrian mass media.

The True Face of Transnistrian Press

One very common technique is to appeal to the emotions of the audience rather than to their powers of reason. This is accomplished with expressions like, "the long-suffering Transnistrian people" and "Romanian-fascist Moldova." This appeal relies on modifiers that emphasize one specific property so that the audience will ignore all others. This is evident when the "nationalist" protest meetings in Chişinău against the Kozak Plan are covered or when the Transnistrian media uses terms like "grant consumers," "actions paid for by

the West," "the blackmailing policy of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund," or "the danger of seizure of state property by the Western corporations if Moldova joins the EU." Often these modifiers are negative as when activists pose in front of video cameras with placards saying "Voronin – thief, war criminal, terrorist!"

Another method for misleading the public is by referring to the authority of anonymous sources. Quotations from documents, evaluations of experts, reports and other materials that seem to be very credible can be presented using this technique. An example of this is the reference made to the report of the International Committee for Democratic Institutions and State Sovereignty that allegedly had been prepared by an anonymous group of world-renowned professors from American universities. The British magazine *The Economist* researched that case and proved that those world-renowned professors had never heard of the committee and had never participated in the preparation of such a report. The statements attributed to the so-called groups of international observers that participated in the referendum and elections on the left side of the Nistru are also rather illustrative. The statement, "The West has enough to learn from Transnistria in respect of democracy," allegedly made by an "unbiased European observer" is a vivid example of how public opinion is molded.

In addition to these two tactics, with the support of Russia, the Transnistrian mass media creates "local experts" and interviews them to get their "expert opinions" which are then widely disseminated along with the names of the new experts. This is why Transnistria has so many "reliable" sources of information like Dmitri Soin, Roman Konoplev, Andrei Țărnă and Valerian Tulgară. The same is true of websites like *Moldovatoday*. The efforts of all such experts and trustworthy sources are summed up in the following statement made by the Tiraspol leadership: "A special role in the process of international recognition of TMR undoubtedly belongs to the mass media."

Another propaganda method used extensively by the Transnistrian press is live coverage. Many of the actions of the youth organization Proryv—an invention of an employee of the Tiraspol security service named Dmitri Soin—such as pulling down the flag of the OSCE Mission in Tiraspol, writing on its façade during the night, burning an effigy of Voronin and burning Moldova's flag and blocking the non-government organization Okno v Mir were filmed by participants who did their best to convey that their actions had massive support.

In order to avoid an unbiased interpretation of events, Transnistrian authorities often initially block the publication of



Graduates of the Advanced School in Journalism, the 2006-2007 class.

information of broad interest to the public and later present their own interpretation of events that due to the lack of other alternatives becomes widely accepted as fact.

The most efficient method of rewriting history used by Tiraspol since the first days after the end of the conflict has been to create an illusory world in books, periodicals, articles, stories, poetry, and radio and TV broadcasts which the public perceives as real. This is nothing less than brain laundering an entire society by manipulating their memories and genuine historical facts. This technique will bring results in only two or three generations. This common goal of Tiraspol and the Russian news agency Regnum owned by Modest Kolerov is easily found on the pages of many books including those by I. Smirnov, O. Gudima and A. Volkova. The most recent product is *The White Book on Transnistria (Belaia kniga Pridnestrovia): An Impartial Account of War and Genocide* presented on 13 September 2006 in Tiraspol.

Transnistrian mass media also often practice the one view method when interviewing. Using this technique, they either ask the opinion of only one person or they ask a group from the same camp, thus creating the illusion that there is a single perspective about an event. An example is Tiraspol leader Igor Smirnov's statement that Chişinău is to blame for the breakdown of negotiations whereas Tiraspol shows goodwill and is always ready for a dialogue. Another example is the fact that only Transnistrian and Russian officials are asked to comment on the new customs regime on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border. They characterize it as an economic block-

ade and falsely insist that Transnistrian companies cannot export or that they pay huge taxes to Moldova.

Presenting a semi-truth is another method of manipulating public opinion. Thus, Tiraspol attributes the collapse of its economic policy to the "economic blockade" imposed by Chişinău.

A very popular method of publishing information in the Transnistrian mass media is the poisonous sandwich when a positive fact is presented with a negative introduction and a negative conclusion that distract the reader and divert his/her attention from the positive information. The sugar sandwich method has exactly the opposite effect; it presents negative information sandwiched between positive information. For example, *Olvia Press* recently published the news that despite its difficulties in 2006, the Transnistrian Bank managed to maintain the exchange rate and to stop inflation. It then notes that the budget has decreased and industrial output is at its 2002 level, but the piece ends with the statement that the situation in the market is stable.

Taking into account the reliance of the Transnistrian leadership on mass media to mold public opinion, the fact that Moldova's leadership practically ignores the breakaway region is very confusing. Chişinău does not allocate resources to counteract Transnistrian propaganda and is thus losing the fight for the hearts and minds of the population on the left side of the Nistru. Efforts to settle this conflict must come from Chişinău and not from the Kremlin.

Dumitru MĂNZĂRARI

Mass Media in Moldova

Political Publicity in Moldova

The Republic of Moldova has assimilated political publicity as a new element in election campaigns over the past several years. There was only one political entity during the Soviet regime. In the absence of competition, the ruling party's political activity was based on propaganda and agitation.

After consolidating a new political environment and proclaiming independence in 1991, political publicity became a new weapon in the fight for power. The first advertisements for candidates for state office were 30–40 seconds long. They approached politics with the aid of simple pictures and text without complex visual effects.

Political pluralism was legalized by the Moldovan Constitution adopted in July 1994, and there has been competition among political parties since. Nevertheless, the Law on Publicity adopted by the Moldovan Parliament in 1997 does not refer to political publicity nor does Moldova have a specific law addressing it. According to the Moldovan Electoral Code, the regulation of political publicity during election campaigns is the prerogative of the Central Electoral Commission.

Voters' Opinions

To what extent today does political publicity manage to impress and attract the attention of the electorate? The general impression of the participants in a study evaluating five political advertisements conducted on the eve of the parliamentary elections of 6 March 2005 was that it doesn't. Advertisement number 1 was from the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (CPRM), number 2 was by the Christian Democratic People's Party (CDPP), number 3 belonged to Our Moldova Bloc (OMB), number 4 to CDPP and number 5 to OMB. The text of the ads is included at the end of this report.

According to the participants, the five ads left negative impressions not only because the information they presented was false and distorted but also because the content was hard to understand, was not serious or was excessively critical. Overall, the ads qualified as unworthy of trust about twice as many times as worthy. Fifty percent of those unworthy of trust were deemed to be negative, and the content of 80% of spots was said to be unpleasant. They rated the ad of the CPRM the most negative; number 2 the most positive, entertaining, optimistic and credible; number 3 the most impressive with the largest number of promises; number 4 as clearly misinforming and overly simple and number 5 the

most joyous and pleasant. Although the participants considered that 45% of the ads were produced skillfully, the same ads were generally regarded as not serious, ineffective or only entertaining.

Promises, Pleasant Music and Nice Pictures

The participants expressed their opinions about the content and presentation of the advertisements. The amount of misleading information was considered to be equal to the amount of truthful information. According to the participants, ad number 5 contained the most truthful information. Tense speeches were noted approximately three times more frequently than tragic pictures and awful music. They especially singled out the CPRM ad as having the largest amount of misleading information and tense speech and as differing from the others by containing tragic music and pictures. Also, the participants stressed that the advertisements presented very little information about the competitors. The CPRM and number 4 ads in fact totally lacked information about the competitors even though these two parties vehemently contested that election. The largest number of promises was made in the OMB ads while stereotypes appeared in the CDPP ads. They noted that their attention was attracted in four out of the five advertisements by the music and considered ads number 2 and number 5 to have the most pleasant music and greatest number of nice pictures.

Emotional Content

A review of the content of each advertisement showed that the CPRM ad used pictures and music that generated negative emotions among the participants at the beginning and optimistic emotions towards the end. The first part strongly criticized previous governments and had harsh music while the second part was done in an optimistic way with energizing and patriotic music. Ad number 2 was produced in a simple way with only optimistic pictures and sounds. Its content included pictures about the holiday season during which the party leader sent season greetings to the voters. Ad number 3 also used only optimistic pictures and music. The Bloc's leader and his voice appeared in the foreground and patriotic music and pictures of various projects for modernizing Chişinău appeared in the background. Ad number 4 like number 2 was simple with only optimistic pictures and sounds. Its content included plans made at a meeting of the party leadership with voters. Ad number 5 was different from the others and had a pronounced anti-communist character. It was produced as a cartoon with background music by the

musical group Planeta Moldova and contained distinctively sarcastic humor.

Strong Emotional Character

The comments of the most popular candidates in the elections of 6 March 2005 on the five advertisements confirmed their strongly emotional character. The politicians tried to get the voters' attention with warnings about a hard future, with a lot of criticism leveled at opponents, with speeches about who they are or with funny images and sounds. Their idea was to "strike while the iron is hot." The striking, however, took place in changing conditions from negative to positive, from easy to hard to understand, from interesting to lacking interest and vice versa.

The participants in the study, on the other hand, said they were bothered by the pictures and sounds as well as by a lot of false and distorted information. As a result, they admitted that the advertisements were not significant sources of information for them. In their opinion, the ads were like clichés associated with something not serious, ephemeral or false. If we assume this to be the truth, then it becomes clear why the voters, especially the undecided ones on whom the final results increasingly depend, do not care if an advertisement contains well-structured, comprehensive information.

Simple and Complicated

The answer of the participants to the question, how should political publicity be produced to be effective, was disappointing. Unfortunately, they thought that political publicity was not effective even if it contained useful or truthful information or when it clearly explained the politicians' proposals for solving the most urgent problems of society. Instead, political ads were considered effective if they contained a significant amount of entertainment. This opinion may be subjective, but it reveals a sad truth. In this age of shows in which pictures prevail, we do not look for explanations for what we do not understand. Instead we label it complicated or comfort ourselves that this is how life is supposed to be.

Why is the electorate confused? As the study results show, they do not pay too much attention to the content of advertisements because the candidates try to appeal to their emotions instead of trying to educate them. Voter comprehension of the messages is therefore very limited, especially if the voter is not acquainted with the political theme. Of course, the politicians want to get their blind trust and don't want them to exercise too much judgment. Politicians play a simple game with voters to diminish their judgment and discernment. The voters in their turn may also play a simple game and ignore the politicians when they make their choices.

Rodica SOCOLOV

Advertisement Number 1: CPRM (54.20 scnds)

"We have been humiliated, robbed and forgotten. We have not believed in the authorities, and the authorities have not believed even in themselves. They have taken everything away from you: even the sense of dignity, even the trust in the future. But you have proved that it is possible and it is necessary to live in Moldova. You know now that Moldova will become a European country with prosperous people. Provided that what was before does not happen again. Provided they who were before do not come back. They will not come back. Moldova wins with us." (Russian)

Advertisement Number 2: CDPP (40.77 scnds)

"CDPP comes to wish you an exceptional year. And an exceptional year for Moldova means the extension of the orange revoluti-

on. Here, in our dear Moldova, which must bring us on 6 March competent and brave people, people capable to take our country to Europe, alongside the other civilized nations. Listen to your heart."

Advertisement Number 3: OMB (30 scnds)

"I am the Mayor of Chisinau. I have won the elections several times. In 2003, I won in a direct fight with Voronin's party. People voted for me because they saw that I can also do good things. I know that people want us to change life into better in the entire country. People have understood that OMB is the real opposition. I believe in you. You will vote the sun on 6 March. We come to do good things."

Advertisement Number 4: CDPP (32.75 scnds)

"I am the Mayor of Chisinau. I have

won the elections several times. In 2003, I won in a direct fight with Voronin's party. People voted for me because they saw that I can also do good things. I know that people want us to change life into better in the entire country. People have understood that OMB is the real opposition. I believe in you. You will vote the sun on 6 March. We come to do good things."

Advertisement Number 5: OMB(30 scnds)

"We have everything, we have cutlets and spice-cakes, yogurt and bacon, and caviar, herring and eggs, garlic sauce, minced meat and popcorn, pizza, broth, potatoes and mashed potatoes. We have everything, kefir, cake and garlic and so on... So on? Enough! It is time for the people also to have something. Our Moldova Bloc, we come to do good things!"

“Most TV Stations Function More Like Political Propaganda Tools than Businesses”

Interview held by “Mass-media” with the Director of PRO TV Chişinău, Cătălin Giosan

Q.: How would you describe the current situation in the Moldovan audiovisual market?

C.G.: This market is still underdeveloped and is strongly influenced by political decisions. TV stations produce few programs of their own, and they are also of poor quality; many programs are broadcast without paying for copyrights.

Q.: If we imagine that the Moldovan audiovisual media is a cake, which part of it would you attribute to PROTV and to other TV stations?

C.G.: In 2006, the money spent on publicity in Moldova was divided among TV stations as follows: ORT Moldova took 55%, PRO TV Chişinău 10%, CTC 9%, NIT 7%, TVM 7%, TV 7 6%, and the remaining 6 % was divided among smaller TV stations.

Q.: Do you still remember the initial activities of PRO TV in Moldova? What were the biggest problems that you had to face back then?

C.G.: The size of the publicity market. In 1998, when we launched PRO TV Chişinău, we would have liked to be able to produce many more local programs. The development of the market in the following years obliged us, however, to limit ourselves only to news. The market has grown enough in the past two years to allow us to produce more and to purchase to programs especially for Moldovan TV viewers.

Q.: We know that in the initial stages PRO TV Chişinău was importing TV stars from Romania like for instance Corina Dănilă. Can we say at present that there are enough TV stars in Moldova that compare with Romanian ones and with those from other countries?

C.G.: The TV labor market is at the same stage of development in Moldova as the TV market, that is, at the beginning. Television is attractive as a job insofar as it is a successful business that pays well. Stars appear as new local programs come out, as TV stations invest in programs and in people. There are only a few people in Moldova who could be considered TV stars.

Q.: How much time and how many resources are necessary to create a TV star in Moldova? Does this type of investment

usually pay off?

C.G.: This trade is hard to learn, and I am not referring here only to presenters or reporters whom the public sees on TV. Each star has behind him/her many people – producers, editors, cameramen, sound operators, graphics directors, scenographers, stylists, sales teams, marketing and managers who in fact work together to make things happen and for programs to take place. All of these jobs are extremely specific; a lot of time is necessary for someone to learn to do them, and the people who leave are extremely hard to replace. The only solution for TV stations is to develop their staffs by themselves.



Q.: Has the Moldovan audiovisual media already reached a certain level of professional maturity, or is there still room for growth?

C.G.: We cannot speak about any kind of maturity. As long as there still are TV stations claiming to be national channels that rent DVDs with the latest movies from around the corner and broadcast them without having the basic respect for copyrights and the Copyright Law, as long as the authorities who must enforce the law close their eyes, as long as entire newscasts are paid for, as long as there are reporters who go from merchant to merchant asking for money to produce news, as long as TV networks broadcast programs over and over again for years in a row without aiming to produce something local, then all we have is just a market place for TV stations, and that is all.

Q.: How fierce is the competition in the local audiovisual market?

C.G.: The competition in the Moldovan TV market is not loyal, and this is in fact a problem. Competition in itself is good as it

generates quality, progress and market, and it is important that it exists. In Moldova, however, there are TV networks that do not pay copyrights and broadcast pirated products and thus have a competitive advantage over the others that pay hundreds of dollars in copyright fees for each program hour. There are private networks that have benefited from state support and thus have had a competitive advantage over the others. There are TV stations that although they hold a ground broadcasting license do not produce a single minute of local programming and thus have a cost advantage over those stations that spend hundreds of thousands of dollars yearly to produce local programs. There are state institutions that pretend not to see these things. This is the competitive nightmare that a TV station that operates legally in Moldova is confronted with.

Q.: What can you say about the advertising market in Moldova? Is it developed enough to ensure normal working conditions for TV stations?

C.G.: The advertising market is extremely small. The good news is that it is growing quickly, and it is possible that we will have a market of over \$20 million in three years. The important thing is that in parallel with market growth there should also be an increase in the level of oversight of TV stations so that the problems we mentioned above—failure to observe the Copyright Law and the Audiovisual Code, the state's involvement with funds in certain TV stations—disappear.

Q.: What do you think about the so-called evaluation agencies that periodically offer their services to Moldovan TV stations? Are such evaluations necessary, and what is their practical effect?

C.G.: At present, different data sets show different things which creates confusion. It is essential that there be only one audience evaluator whose data are acknowledged by all users and to which all users—TV stations, advertising agencies, clients—will refer.

PRO TV is consulting with the entire market about conducting an audit of the people-metric system of audience evaluation. Although this is a costly, long-term process, we hope that we will have a definitive report on this system by the end of the year after which the market will decide on the next steps for achieving the goal of a single acknowledged evaluator.

Q.: Who dictates the rules of the game in Moldovan audiovisual media, the politicians or the professionals?

C.G.: Most TV channels function more like political propaganda tools than businesses.

Q.: What can you say about the audiovisual reform that took place last summer? Have you felt the effects of these changes in practice?

C.G.: The new Audiovisual Code has come out which, though not perfect, is very good. The new Coordinating Council of Audiovisual Media has been established. We would like this Council to be strong and active but also be balanced and impartial and to implement the new Code strictly. But at the same time, the Council must have the power to resist political orders and pressures to favor or disfavor one TV station over another. If this does not happen, it will lose its moral credibility and the authority it needs to reform Moldova's audiovisual media.

Q.: What would the liberalization of the audiovisual market mean to you, and do you, in general, believe that such liberalization is necessary?

C.G.: Everyone is free in Moldova to set up a TV station, to produce programs and then distribute them by cable networks, or to file an application for a ground distribution license. Television activities are regulated both from a technical point of view and as a framework, and this is normal because they have strong social impact and use, in the case of air broadcasting, state resources that are limited i.e., radio frequencies.

From a legal point of view, things are clear and there is nothing to liberalize. From here on, it is the task of state institutions only to monitor TV station activities, to apply the law where necessary in moderation and in good faith and to apply the criteria stipulated by the law in licensing and in extending licenses.

Q.: How do you see the evolution of the local audiovisual market in the next ten years?

C.G.: I think that the market will exceed 100 \$ million in ten years, which would be enough to allow four or five general TV stations and many niche TV stations to exist. The rate of installation of cable television in Moldovan households will exceed 90% including in rural areas, and thus ground broadcasting licenses will have little relevance, as the programs will mainly be distributed by cable. The cost of program transportation by satellite or cable will be so small that anyone will be able to afford to make programs available to all users, both within the country and anywhere in the world. Due to the speed of technological development, the Internet will become a major means of program distribution and consumption. Winners in this race will be the channels that are capable of creating local content of good quality. At the same time, the TV public will consume a lot of content produced in neighboring countries, especially in Russia and Romania. These markets will always be more sophisticated than Moldova's due to their size. This means that they will also produce higher quality programs.

For conformity:
Igor VOLNIȚCHI

Independent Journalism Center:

Freedom of expression and information in the Republic of Moldova

Annual Report 2006

Legislative Changes

In 2006, the Audio-visual Code was adopted. Both international organizations (experts from the Council of Europe, OSCE and Article 19) and Moldovan media NGOs undertook unprecedented efforts aimed at adopting a good law. Despite these efforts, the government coalition managed to adopt a law that promotes their own interests and again succeeded in choosing a convenient Broadcast Coordinating Council (CCA) and in maintaining its control over Teleradio-Moldova Public Broadcasting Company. Also it suppressed two other audio-visual institutions with independent editorial policies: radio Antena C and Euro TV Chişinău. The Code was adopted on July 27, 2006 with a majority of 70 votes and entered into force on August 18. Both the draft code and the adopted act have been the subject of criticism from several media organizations and political parties. From March to August of 2006, numerous declarations were made on this topic. Also, civil society organized a series of debates and round tables in order to improve the draft law and to convince the authors of the need to adopt the highest standards in the field.

Although less significant in impact, several changes have been made to Article 16 of the Civil Code with regard to liability for defamation. The Article lists a series of criteria that may help judges in deciding “reasonable” compensation for defamed persons. Still, the modifications did not include a ceiling for compensating moral damages which was the desire of many mass media entities.

In the summer of 2006, both Parliament and the Government adopted decisions that provide for a 10–20% increase in the salaries of civil servants who have access to state secrets. The decisions are effective retroactively to December 1, 2005. Experts on the subject have publicly stated their opinions that these decisions will stimulate secret-mania in state institutions: “Besides state secrets which need to be protected, information of public interest will be concealed.” On the other hand, civil servants from the Information and Security Service have explained that this increase was operated in accordance with the Law on State Secrets of 1994. They believe

that such decisions are necessary because various rights and liberties are denied to the holders of state secrets.

Changes in the Audio-visual Sector

Events Prior to the Adoption of the Audio-visual Code

The situation of the audio-visual media has been criticized almost continuously in recent times. In March, radio Vocea Basarabiei broadcast a call for financial support from its listeners, banking institutions, economic agencies and foundations from Moldova and other countries. They blamed their lack of finances on interference of state authorities in their activities that left them unable to develop a national radio network. Over 70 of their requests for radio frequencies have been denied.

Adoption of the Audio-visual Code

On July 27, the draft Code was adopted in the final reading. It had undergone multiple enhancements, but they were insignificant. In October, the nine members of the Broadcast Coordinating Council were elected by Parliament. Again, their selection was severely criticized by civil society, including the majority of political parties. By the time the members of the Monitoring Council of Teleradio Moldova were elected, public opinion was resigned to the fact that this Council would include a majority of “people from the government coalition” as opposed to well-known persons who genuinely promote the public interest.

Following the adoption of the Audio-visual Code, the most dramatic changes occurred at public municipal stations Antena C and Euro TV Chişinău. Based on a Broadcast Coordinating Council recommendation of November 30, 2006, the Chişinău Municipal Council decided to sell the stations. On December 14, the Municipal Council invited bids for the stations and dismissed their directors naming new directors to replace them. On December 15, the management of Antena C was forcibly removed by representatives of local public authorities and law enforcement agencies. On December 16, Antena C’s transmission ceased. The reason given by the state enterprise Radiocomunicatii was technical

difficulties. The employees were not allowed to conduct an independent investigation. Following “repairs,” transmission was not renewed due to the “lack of a contract with Radio-comunicatii.” Transmission was re-established only 38 days later following a warning from the Broadcast Coordinating Council about license withdrawal due to a failure to conform to the Audio-visual Code. On the evening of December 16, the headquarters of Antena C were closed and all journalists were evacuated because of a bomb scare though the personnel who came to look for the bomb did not have any special equipment, the fire department and ambulances were missing and the inhabitants of nearby houses were not evacuated. It was clearly a set up. Since the replacement of their director, the employees of Euro TV Chişinău have identified numerous cases of censorship.

In the beginning of 2007, the situations of these public municipal stations deteriorated. The companies were purchased by unknown persons using financial sources of dubious origin. There were massive discharges at Antena C. Chişinău Municipal Council actions included legal violations, and 38 employees from both companies have sued municipal authorities. They have also asked for a cancellation of the decisions of November 30 and December 14 and have claimed moral damages. Moreover, the former directors of Antena C (Vasile State) and Euro TV Chişinău (Arcadie Gherasim) have sued Chişinău Municipal Council for illegally dismissing them. Media organizations and political parties have repeatedly condemned the re-organization of the stations. International organizations have reacted as well. The conclusions of a project for monitoring the implementation of the Audio-visual Code, coordinated by APEL (Case Study: Antena C and Euro TV Chişinău made public on February 7, 2007) state, “The way in which the re-organization of municipal broadcasters Antena C and Euro TV Chişinău has been carried out has infringed on the rights of the public to information. Public interest has not been taken into consideration in the process of re-organization. The opinion of municipal communities has not been consulted. The rights of employees of the two companies have been ignored. The case of Antena C and Euro TV Chişinău, which is currently in the attention of national and international public opinion, may not in any way serve the purpose of sector development as declared in the Audio-visual Code (Article 1) and has compromised the European perspective of the Republic of Moldova.”

Public Company Teleradio-Moldova

During Press Freedom Day (May 3, 2006), 12 embassies and foreign institutions accredited in Chişinău issued a common

declaration expressing their concerns regarding the situation of mass media in the Republic of Moldova. The signers emphasized their regrets that despite repeated affirmations of Moldovan authorities regarding their commitment to the values that characterize a free, independent, pluralistic press, over the past year no significant progress has been noted in press reform. In particular, they expressed their concerns regarding the lack of any progress in reforming Teleradio-Moldova, in removing impediments to access to information and in state support for certain press representatives.

Intimidation at PRO TV Chişinău

The month of September was marked by untoward events at the television network PRO TV Chişinău. On September 7, 2006, sales director Ghenadie Braghis was detained and accused of bribery. Throughout the whole of September 8, his lawyer, Vladimir Rosca, was not allowed to meet with him although he filed four requests to do so. PRO TV Chişinău declared that the actions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs amounted to pressure to influence the company’s editorial policy. In the framework of the campaign “Access to Information,” PRO TV Chişinău had broadcast information about the university diploma of Minister of Internal Affairs Gheorghe Papuc, the use of the ministry’s vehicles and abuses by the police.

Sources from the Ministry say that this news bothered Minister Papuc. (The print press in Moldova had published stories suggesting that Minister Papuc’s university diploma was counterfeit. Under the Law on Access to Information, PRO TV Chişinău requested a copy of the diploma but could not obtain one.). According to the same source, Mr. Braghis’ arrest was an attempt to compromise the credibility of the station with both its viewers and commercial partners.

On September 9, policemen appeared with a warrant to search the station. When the security officer asked them to wait for the station’s lawyer so that he could assist the police with the search, the security officer was taken to the Buiucani District Police Headquarters and charged with insubordination. The policemen then searched the station’s office for several hours. The same day, employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs searched the house of Mr. Braghis. These events were condemned in writing both by media organizations and by several political parties. The signers requested the authorities to respect the legislation in force and stop harassing and intimidating PRO TV Chişinău and its employees. Five days after his arrest, Ghenadie Braghis was released on parole.

The Situation of the Print Media and Investigative Journalism

Pressures on Journalists: Obstacles to Practicing their Profession

Accreditation has frequently caused problems for journalists. It falls under the Law on the Press of 1994 in which most of the provisions refer to the accreditation of foreign journalists (articles 21, 22, 23 and 25). The sole provision on Moldovan journalists is Article 21, paragraph (2): "Periodical publications and press agencies may accredit journalists accordingly with the local public authorities, as well as for artistic and sports events." This ambiguous provision ("... accordingly...") is the basis for internal regulations that institutions use to create their own norms for accreditation. Some of these regulations are not even made public. Up to the present, the main form of pressuring journalists by public authorities has been to threaten to deny them accreditation.

In January 2006, the Popular Assembly of the Autonomous Gagauz Territorial Unit refused to accredit the newspaper *Edinaya Gagauzia*, the publication of the social-political movement with the same name. The refusal was justified on the grounds that the opposition publication distorted facts. The Chief Editor of *Edinaya Gagauzia* denies this and has affirmed that this was an invented reason as the paper never had access to the meetings of the Popular Assembly. On February 20, the paper sued the Popular Assembly for refusing accreditation, but later withdrew its petition from the Comrat Court of Appeals. Sources from *Edinaya Gagauzia* have anonymously declared that the court was on the journalists' side and that the paper was pressured to withdraw the suit. No reference has been made, though, as to who applied the pressure. In June, *Edinaya Gagauzia* called the public's attention to the attempts of local authorities to interfere with its subscription campaign. According to the article, the head of UTA Gagauz Yeri, Gheorshi Tabunscik, ordered post offices to refuse to deliver subscriptions of the paper in order to shut it down. /based on Media Monitor Agency: 03.01.06, 08.02.06, 22.02.06, 21.03.06, 27.06.06/.

Since the date of its adoption (in February 2003), the Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity has been intensely criticized by civil society and regarded as dangerous for democracy. Although so far no charges have been brought based on this law, it has been used several times as a scare tactic. At the beginning of 2006, the Hyde Park Association of Chişinău, an organization promoting freedom of expression and the right to objective information, was accused by the Ministry of Justice of Moldova of propagating extremism through information published in the Curaj.net bulletin. A letter from

the Minister of Justice, Victoria Iftodi, directed to the Hyde Park Association indicated that issue number three of the Curaj.net bulletin (November 3, 2005) included information that, "...implies the inferiority of citizens based on nationality. This represents a severe infringement of the provisions of Article 1 of the Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity. With this letter, the Ministry of Justice warns the Hyde Park Association and requests the registration of the publication since the association's paper is issued for commercial purposes." The President of Hyde Park, Oleg Brega, has declared that the warning represents pressure on the association and that the accusations brought by the minister are unfounded. The Ministry of Justice did not indicate what specific text in the bulletin implies inferiority based on nationality. The association published a declaration that representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the Information and Security Service, the Prosecutors Office and the police have warned the members of the organization, both verbally and in writing, in regard to items published in the Curaj paper and that this constitutes intimidation and harassment. /based on Media Monitor Agency, February 13, 2006, February 15, 2006/.

On March 17, 2006, a serious case of aggression towards a journalist took place in Chişinău. The sports reporter Ion Robu was beaten unconscious by two unidentified persons. The attackers did not take any of the reporter's belongings though he had both money and a cell phone on him. The reporter considers that this attack is directly related to his professional activities. He does not exclude the possibility of having been maltreated because of a scandal surrounding the Sports Press Association of Moldova. Also, the book *Athens Marathon*, edited after the Olympic Games in Greece highlighted some irregularities allowed by the National Olympic Committee of Moldova. Media organizations have declared their concern in writing regarding this case noting that, "Attempts to damage physical integrity represent the most severe form of undermining press freedom."

While the case of Ion Robu was the most serious of its kind in 2006 in Chişinău, Moldovan journalists frequently confront hostile attitudes and verbal aggression. On March 24, 2006, Anastasia Nani, a reporter from the newspaper *Ziarul de Garda* was verbally abused by police officers and precluded from exercising her duty as a journalist. She was trying to get information for an article about the church in Floresti where violent confrontations had occurred as a result of a conflict between the followers of the Archdiocese of Basarabia and representatives of the Archdiocese of Moldova. On October 26, 2006, Ms. Nani was again precluded from exercising her duties. On that day, she was forced by government officials to delete all the pictures in her camera. She had attended a meeting of the Collegium of the Ministry of

Education and Youth and when leaving the building saw a group of workers doing some landscaping next to the Cabinet building. She took a picture of the workers with the government building in the background. Two people approached her immediately and after refusing to identify themselves insisted on deleting all the pictures in her camera although she had taken pictures of a completely public area and no sign banning photos was posted anywhere nearby.

On July 13, seven mass media organizations expressed their concern in connection with attacks on the freedom of the press. In particular, they referred to the attempts of representatives of the ruling party to impose its ideology by threatening to apply sanctions against any publications and broadcasters daring to express opposing viewpoints on events. At the end of July, representatives of the Chişinău Municipal Council dominated by the Communist Party of Moldova (CPRM) charged that public municipal stations Antena C and Euro TV, and the newspaper *Timpul de dimineaţă* (*Morning Time*) had misinterpreted events that happened 65 years ago and that their interpretations were not correct from the communists' point of view. Signatories of the statement made by the media organizations also alerted the public about attempts to economically undermine the newspapers *Moldavskie Vedomosti* and *Jurnal de Chişinău*. *Moldavskie Vedomosti* was privatized six years ago but is likely to lose its premises as a result of the recent request of the Court of Appeals to cancel the privatization of the building. *Jurnal de Chişinău* was accused of failure to pay VAT totaling over half a million lei, which if paid would bankrupt the newspaper. In their statement, the mass media organizations asked that the authorities bring clear evidence proving due enforcement and safeguarding the inalienable rights and freedoms of the press to inform and of the citizens to be informed and to express their opinions freely through press outlets.

On August 1, 2006, the police from Bălţi obstructed the activity of photo journalists and TV cameras around the monument to Ştefan cel Mare şi Sfânt (Stefan the Great and Holy) in the center of the city. The day before, unknown persons defiled the base of the monument with paint by writing in Russian, "I am against Voronin." The police did not allow any pictures of the desecrated monument and behaved aggressively with a camera man from TVB (TV Bălţi) who tried to shoot despite police restrictions. The police also did not allow photojournalists from DECA-press Agency and the newspaper *SP* to take pictures.

On October 26, the weekly investigative newspaper *Ziarul de Garda* published in Chişinău released a press statement in which it warned the public about pressure on journalists who had uncovered corruption in the legal system

of Moldova. Persons holding important state positions tried to bribe the journalists with money in exchange for compromising their report. They may also have tried to collect "evidence" against them in order to bully them in the future, a trick also used lately against other media organizations for the purpose of "documenting" files, as reported in signed statements.

In the same period (10–11 October), several items were stolen from the editorial office of *Jurnal de Chişinău*, including the computer of journalist Raisa Lozinschi, the author of several articles with political connotations. In light of those events, the Association of Independent Press (API) and Independent Journalism Center (CIJ) made a statement requesting that the Parliamentary Committee for National Security, Defense and Public Order and the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights investigate the cases reported in *Ziarul de Garda* and examine them carefully. API and CIJ urged attention to the strange "coincidence" that when pressure was applied on the employees of *Ziarul de Garda*, a theft occurred at *Jurnal de Chişinău* which the editorial staff treated as an attempt to intimidate its journalists. These two media organizations requested that immediate and efficient action be taken with a view to ending attacks on the independent press.

At the request of the chairman of the raion, the local prosecutor's office investigated the legality of the publication *Observatorul de Nord, Editie de Floresti* (Northern Observer, Floresti edition). The results showed that the activities of the publication in the raion were totally legal. The manager stated that the request of the chairman was due to his fear of losing the battle to control the newspaper as he would like to. /see Monitor Media Agency, April 13, 2006/.

The newspaper *Jurnal de Chişinău* had serious problems when an inspection by the tax authorities revealed that they had failed to pay VAT amounting to 360,765 lei in 2004 and 2005 and then issued a decision by which the newspaper had to pay the amount plus penalties, charges for delays and fines totaling 630,156 MDL (about 37,000 euros). The newspaper contested that decision, and the legal dispute is still ongoing. *Jurnal de Chişinău* believes that the ruling of the tax authorities is an attempt by the ruling power to destroy the newspaper.

In October 2006, the Center for Journalistic Investigations (CIN) said its website www.investigatii.md was attacked and ceased to function. The site included over 100 journalistic investigations in both Romanian and English that had been carried out during the past three years, as well as documents and photos obtained by journalists during their investigations. The attack completely destroyed CIN's web database including the archive with investigations, comments and

other materials. CIN declared that it did not exclude the fact that the web page could have been damaged deliberately with the intention to destroy the database of the Center.

The campaign for election of the head of Gagauzia TAU was accompanied by many violations of the right to freedom of expression. By the end of November, the police had confiscated about 5000 copies of the newspaper *Gagauz Halkâ*, and Serghei Dimoglo, ex-deputy chairman of the People's Assembly (the legislative body of Gagauzia TAU) was apprehended and kept in custody for seven days accused of resisting police during an on-the-spot examination of the newspaper's premises. The newspaper contained several articles criticizing the current Gagauzian government and of that of the Republic of Moldova as well. In light of these events, the political movement Edinaya Gagauzia made a statement declaring that the arrests of Dimoglo and the confiscation of the newspaper's print run were unlawful. *Gagauz Halkâ* has been published in Gagauzia TAU since 1999 with periodic lapses. The political movement considered that such actions intimidated certain candidates in the election race. /reported by Monitor Media Agency, 1 December 2006/.

Inspections by fiscal authorities of the premises of the Bălți newspaper *SP* were also considered to be intimidation. After noticing that an employee had not accounted for three advertisements totaling 54 lei (about 3 euros) or issued cash receipts for them, three officials started checking all documents on the commercial activity of the newspaper. The officers checked all ad-related contracts for 2005 and 2006 signed by the newspaper and made copies of the sales register for the same period. Slava Perunov, Chief Editor of *SP* considered it an attempt to pressure the newspaper but did not issue a statement about any negative consequences of the inspection.

Support for Publications Favorable to the Ruling Powers

Unfortunately, the state is still backing newspapers favorable to its policies. In February, *Jurnal de Chișinău* published information about a document of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism signed by the Deputy Minister Tatiana Lăpucăș that recommended all heads of institutions under its control to subscribe to the newspapers *Moldova Suverana* and *Nezavisimaya Moldova*, to the magazine *Moldova* and to the *Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova* (*Official Gazette of Moldova*). According to the document signed on January 31 of this year, the heads were asked, "...to personally contribute to an efficient organization of subscriptions for national periodicals for 2006 and first of all to such central publications as *Moldova Suverană*, *Nezavisimaya Moldova*, *Moldova* and *Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova* [...] The ministry shall be informed about the subscription results by the end of each

quarter." The same Ministry had issued a similar document at the end of the previous year, a fact reported by *Ziarul de Gardă* on November 16, 2006. Raisa Caraman, Head of the Training and Education Acts Unit of the Ministry gave the following explanation: "Free publications handle publicity on their own, whereas *Moldova Suverana* and *Nezavisimaya Moldova* are recommended by us since they facilitate better knowledge of the subscribers of government activity."

Though transferred from state to private ownership, the former government newspapers continue to be supported by the Government. In December 2005, the Government allotted over 376,000 lei (approximately 29,000 United States dollars [\$]) to the editorial office of *Moldova Suverana* for printing expenses which was called "one-time financial aid" while *Nezavisimaya Moldova* received financial aid of 81,300 lei (\$6,200) to repay an outstanding debt to Universul Printing House.

The Press in the Electoral Campaign

The Association of Independent Press and the Independent Journalist Center were assigned to monitor the coverage of the Gagăuzia election campaign in the mass media. The results of monitoring the first round of balloting showed that the majority of media outlets from Gagauzia supported then acting governor (Bashcan) Gheorghe Tabușciuc. Favoritism towards Tabușciuc was shown in various newsreels about the progress achieved by the Gagauzia administration avoiding any critique of his leadership. The newspaper *Nastoiășce Znamea* (from Ceadâr-Lunga) that supported the independent candidate Mihail Formuzal, Mayor of Ceadâr-Lunga, was the only exception during that time as it provided some negative feedback on the Bashcan. In addition, the audiovisual broadcasters monitored other than Radio Moldova ignored all the contestants in the race except for Gheorghe Tabușciuc. The national paper *Nezavisimaya Moldova* did not write a word about the elections in Gagauzia. Of all the audiovisual media, only Radio Gagauzia included election education programs in their broadcasts, while the others monitored did not have any election debates.

The OSCE Mission also noted substantial favoritism during the election campaign for Gheorghe Tabușciuc by state regional mass media, representatives of local and central authorities and the ruling party. In the first press statement released after the first ballot, the Mission noted that all candidates had had access to mass media and could participate in TV debates organized by Teleradio Gagauzia, but that the value of those debates was significantly reduced since Tabușciuc refused to participate. Furthermore, the Mission noted that law enforcement agencies restricted the campaign

activities of opposition candidates. For example, on November 28, 5000 copies of a newspaper that supported an opposition candidate were confiscated. Despite that, on December 3 when the first ballot was held in Gaguzia, Mihail Formuzal, Mayor of Ceadâr Lunga, got most of the votes followed by Nicolae Dudoglo, Mayor of Comrat. Thus, Tabunșcic was out of the race after the first ballot, and Mihail Formuzal became Bashcan of Găgăuzia in the runoff held on December 17.

Access to Information

Accessibility of Information

In 2006, the laws of the Republic of Moldova became accessible via the Internet. The Ministry of Justice launched the web page www.justice.md which contains nearly all the legislation of the Republic. This page is administered by the Center for Legal Information and has a navigation device for searching for legal acts. The publication of shorthand records of parliamentary sessions on the Internet continued in 2006 (the first shorthand records went on line in the summer of 2005).

The Standing Bureau of Parliament approved a new regulation for accrediting journalists who attend its sessions. According to the new regulation, accreditation permits will be issued for the entire mandate of Parliament and not for just one year as was done before. In addition, the plenary sessions of Parliament continued to be broadcast live on the public radio and TV stations of Teleradio Moldova, but the communists in the legislative body insisted on suspending live radio and TV broadcasts several times during the year. The communists considered them inefficient and called for creating programs for radio and TV that would provide summary information about the activities of Parliament. Although these live broadcasts still continue, in the opinion of the public, their sustainability is rather fragile.

Television channel TV7 started transmitting its own programs like “Segodnea v Moldove” (“In Moldova Today”), “Cotidian” (“Daily News”) and entertainment programs in 2006. In addition, the BBC extended its local broadcasting and also opened a modern office in Moldova. Flux Press Agency, on the other hand, had to close down for economic reasons after over 11 years of operation.

Journalists frequently complained of limited access and discriminatory treatment depending on how acceptable their stories were to the ruling powers. Thus, only some of the journalists accredited to the Office of the President (namely official and pro-presidential press agencies) were invited to the briefing organized by President Vladimir Voronin after his official meeting with President Putin on August 8, 2006.

The same was true after Voronin participated in the Summit of the Heads of CIS held in Minsk and his meeting with Vladimir Putin there (November 2006). When writing about those briefings, both independent press agencies and reporters from foreign press agencies accredited in Moldova had to rely on the information broadcast by official mass media.

The practice of selectively inviting members of the press to attend official meetings or events has also been mentioned in relation to other dignitaries as well. At a meeting held in the Parliament building in June to which Marian Lupu, Speaker of Parliament, invited civil society and mass media representatives to discuss the possibility of amending Article 16 of the Civil Code, Dmitri Ciubașenko, Director of the newspaper *Moldavskie Vedomosti* was refused access because his name was not on the list of invitees. The same was true for Constantin Tănase from the newspaper *Timpul de dimineață*. The names of those two journalists were removed from the list at the behest of Maria Postoico, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament. /as reported by Monitor Media Agency, June 8, 2006/.

Legal Proceedings and Limitations on Access to Information

In 2006, journalists won several lawsuits related to access to information. One of the most remarkable victories was that the Supreme Court of Justice ruled that keeping decisions of the Court of Accounts secret about the use of public funds by the staff of Parliament and by the staff of the President was illegal (Decision of the Court of Accounts on the findings of the financial revision of the Parliament Staff for 2002 No. 55-s of July 10, 2003 and Decision of the Court of Accounts on the findings of the financial revision of the Presidential Staff for 2002 No. 56-s of July 11, 2003). That action was initiated at the request of Ștefan Secăreanu against the Court of Accounts and the Interdepartmental Committee for the Protection of State Secrets in which he requested that keeping the decisions secret be ruled illegal because information contained in them could not imperil the security of the Republic.

The newspaper *Timpul de dimineață* alerted the public that the Court of Accounts requested the Chișinău Prosecutor's Office to investigate the paper for making its findings public. On February 8 after the decision on lifting secrecy was adopted in the court of first instance, *Timpul de dimineață* published an article about the staff of Parliament entitled “Court of Accounts Proved that Parliament Steals Public Money,” and on February 9 it published an article about the President's staff entitled “Employees of the Office of the Presidential Hatch a ‘Souvenir’ Scheme.” Both were signed by Ina Prisăcăru. These two articles stated that the staffs of both Parliament and the Office of the President had been fraudulently

spending public money and that that fact had been proven by the findings of the investigation of the Court of Accounts. A week after these articles appeared in the newspaper, Ms. Prisăcaru was called to the Prosecutor's Office and asked to give a written explanation for the rationale for writing the articles. The journalist said the Court of Accounts was using the Prosecutor's Office to intimidate the press; however, it wouldn't work because the appellate court also ruled against keeping the information secret considering the request to do so groundless.

On October 31, 2006, DECA-press News Agency from Bălți made a statement that one reporter was not allowed to attend public hearings in a lawsuit in Drochia District Court. The judge explained her refusal saying that media representatives were entitled to be present only at the first hearing of a trial and when the sentence is passed, an erroneous interpretation of the legislation in force. To justify her decision, the judge stated that journalists did not have any right to take pictures or make audio or video recordings during public hearings none of which the journalist had intended to do.

Vasile Roadedeal from Calarasi Raion won a lawsuit against Parliament at the Supreme Court of Justice for its failure to enforce the Law on Access to Information. He had requested information from Parliament on how some MPs were sanc-

tioned for having benefited from public funds without making proper social payments. The Court instructed Parliament to provide the information requested to the gentleman from Calarasi and to compensate him in the amount of 214 lei for court fees, but it failed to require payment of moral damages to him.

During the last three years, the Center for Journalistic Investigations (CIN) managed to win several important lawsuits related to breaches of the rules for access to information. In 2006, CIN won two lawsuits against the General Prosecutor's Office: in March the Supreme Court of Justice ruled in favor of CIN for the refusal of the prosecutor's office to accredit one reporter and in October after trial that lasted for more than two years, the same court obliged the office to disclose the names of prosecutors who had received allowances unlawfully.

Conclusions

While journalists were under pressure throughout the year, the situation of freedom of expression in Moldova significantly deteriorated in the second half of the year after the beginning of the implementation of the new Audio-visual Code. It appears evident that this document is mainly going to be used for suppressing the critical voices of local broadcasters.

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